STAGE GUILD PLAYS

MORE QUICK CURTAINS

KENNETH SAWYER GOODMAN

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BY

KENNETH SAWYER GOODMAN

CHICAGO
THE STAGE GUILD
MCMXXIII

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NOTE

In the preface to "Quick Curtains", Mr. Thomas Wood Stevens, who collaborated on several occasions with Mr. Kenneth Sawyer Goodman, has dealt with the principal qualities and aspects of the latter's work. A brief personal note from one who worked with him in the practical field of dramatic production may serve as an introduction to the present volume.

I met Mr. Goodman in the autumn of 1913 when, under the auspices of the now defunct Chicago Theatre Society, of which he was a director, I organized a season of repertory at the Art Theatre, as what is known as the Playhouse was then called. Mr. Goodman's interest in the theatre was not only intense but practical. He had a quiet enthusiasm united with shrewd judgment which made his advice of great value in all departments. Others, however, had to tell me of his claims to authorship, and I found that he was inclined to make light of his capacity in this direction. He was reluctant to permit me to include "The Game of Chess", which he had just completed, in my programme; but after the unquestionable success of the performance—the piece was admirably played with Mr. Walter Hampden and Mr. Whitford Kane in the principal parts—he was compelled to admit that my insistence had been justified. It was under the stimulus of our need for one act plays that he soon afterward wrote "Barbara" and "The Winged Bear", and though the repertory season had come to a

close he continued with a series of collaborations with Mr. Ben Hecht. He was always feeling his way towards the writing of a full length play, and there is little doubt that he would have succeeded in this more ambitious field if the war had not brought his work in the navy, and his early death had not terminated his career.

Mr. Goodman told me more than once that his previous plays had always been written when there was a definite likelihood of production, and the fact that a theatre existed where his plays were welcomed was unquestionably a spur to his productivity. It seems to me that the numerous Little Theatres which now exist would be well advised in making more effort in the direction of looking for and encouraging original work, even though it is, of course, most unlikely that such a finished talent as Mr. Goodman's could be expected to develop in every group.

B. IDEN PAYNE.

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A list of the plays and masques written by Mr. Goodman, either alone or in collaboration, is appended:

By Kenneth Sawyer Goodman: QUICK CURTAINS, including the following: Dust of the Road, The Game of Chess, Barbara, Ephraim and the Winged Bear, A Man Can Only Do His Best. MORE QUICK CURTAINS, including The Green Scarf, The Red Flag, The Parting, Behind the Black Cloth, At the Edge of the Wood, and Dancing Dolls.

In collaboration with Thomas Wood Stevens: MASQUES OF EAST AND WEST, including The Daimio's Head, Montezuma, Caesar's Gods, Rainald and the Red Wolf, Quetzal's Bowl, and A Pageant for Independence Day. Also the following plays: Ryland, Goya, Holbein in Blackfriars.

In collaboration with Ben Hecht: Henri Durot, The Two Lamps, The Death Watch, The Hand of Siva, An Idyll of the Shops, The Poem of David, The Home-coming, The Egg and the Hen, The Hero of Santa Maria, and The Wonder Hat.

In collaboration with Wallace Rice: The Gateway of the West.

STAGE GUILD PLAYS

THE GREEN SCARF

Copyright, 1920, by Frank Shay

THE GREEN SCARF was originally produced by the Guild Players, Pittsburgh, February 21, 1920, with the following cast:

A MAN..... C. Frederick Steen
A WOMAN.....Hazel Beck

THE GREEN SCARF

The Place is a city park. The Time is about two a. m. The setting is extremely shallow, consisting merely of a back drop, representing a line of shrubbery and above it a night sky. There is a lamp post in the center of the stage and below it a bench, at the opposite ends of which sit THE MAN *and* THE WOMAN, *with their shoulders slightly turned to one another.* THE MAN *is in evening dress and wears a silk hat and an Inverness overcoat. He is smoking a cigar and gloomily regarding the toes of his patent leather pumps, which he has thrust out in front of him.* THE WOMAN, *who is perhaps thirty years old, and of sleek and prosperous appearance, is exquisitely gowned as if for the opera and wears a sumptuous evening wrap. She has jeweled pendants in her ears and a green chiffon scarf thrown loosely about her neck. The faces of both are very white and expressionless in the moonlight, giving them the appearance of Marionettes.*

As the curtain rises, THE MAN *takes out his watch, glances at it, shrugs his shoulder, tosses away his cigar and speaks without turning his head.*

THE MAN. You have been sitting here almost an hour and the park is excessively damp. May I suggest that you are, perhaps, wasting valuable time?

THE WOMAN. Your insinuation is extremely stupid. I am not trying to scrape an acquaintance with you. I have been far too carefully brought up.

THE MAN. I had no intention of offending you.

THE WOMAN. I am not in the least offended. Since chance has thrown us together, I frankly admit that your interest is not wholly repellant. There is a certain comfort in feeling the reaching out of another's intelligence to explore the hidden strata of one's troubled and possibly kindred soul.

THE MAN. Once and under other circumstances I might have investigated the geologic structure of your sub-conscious ego with the avidity of a connoisseur. Tonight I am entirely engrossed with the consideration of my own.

THE WOMAN. How like a man! You are both selfish and incurious.

THE MAN. I am neither. In fact, I have put myself to the unspeakable inconvenience of waiting fifty-seven minutes simply to spare you a most unpleasant experience.

THE WOMAN. I am so sorry.

THE MAN. How infernally like a woman to say that.

THE WOMAN. You cannot irritate me with a phrase that has become quite familiar at my own breakfast table.

THE MAN. My dear madam, since you are evidently impervious to polite hints, I may as well give you the unvarnished truth. Had it not been for the fortuitous obstacle of your presence I should already have committed suicide.

THE WOMAN. How very odd?

THE MAN. Odd?

THE WOMAN. You have been delightfully frank. I will, therefore, be equally so. We are here for the same purpose.

THE MAN. How damned annoying.

THE WOMAN. I cannot see why?

THE MAN. Does it occur to you that, when two persons of opposite sex die together, they lay themselves open to the most salacious inferences on the part of the press?

THE WOMAN. I had supposed that suicide as a sequel to questionable adventure was generally undertaken in the privacy of a hotel. Surely a bench in the park—

THE MAN. I fear it will not be accepted as absolute guarantee of innocence. My mother and sisters would be inexpressibly shocked.

THE WOMAN. How like a man. You are thinking only of your own reputation. Have you a card and pencil?

THE MAN. [*Feeling in his pockets.*] I believe so, why?

THE WOMAN. I at least have some presence of mind. I shall write a note and pin it to my frock. I shall say that I have never even laid eyes on you before.

THE MAN. It would be simpler merely to move to another bench.

THE WOMAN. If anyone is to move, it is certainly your place as a gentleman.

THE MAN. I should be happy to accommodate you, but unfortunately this spot is hallowed for me by certain recollections.

THE WOMAN. I must insist upon remaining for precisely the same reason. I could not take my life elsewhere with any degree of satisfaction.

THE MAN. Oh, well, I suppose this is what comes of having sacred associations with localities of a public or semi-public nature.

THE WOMAN. Quite so. One is obliged to share one's rights with so many other people.

THE MAN. Before we discuss the question of rights, may I presume to ask what has driven you to this desperate and irrevocable step?

THE WOMAN. I hope you grant that it is the first duty of every advanced person to express his true character in terms of art or action?

THE MAN. I must admit that I fail to see the connection.

THE WOMAN. You will perhaps understand me better when I say that in spite of all indications to the contrary, I feel that I possess the soul of a Lucretia Borgia.

THE MAN. In that case, I should think murder, or possibly arson, a more suitable means of self expression.

THE WOMAN. If I could bring myself to commit them, yes. But I have been far too carefully brought up. I am completely the creature of my early education and environment. I cannot even sit through a mildly immoral play without a distinct feeling of nausea.

THE MAN. I have been told that morality is the desirable result of altruistic concepts applied in the so-called interests of society.

THE WOMAN. I cannot willingly subscribe to any system which destroys the character of the individual, however vicious, for the benefit of a large number of ordinary persons whom one is not in the least likely to meet.

THE MAN. But with a natural predilection for evil, surely a little firmness on your part—

THE WOMAN. How little you realize the life of a female child in a Christian home. The seven deadly virtues may be grafted upon her as easily as tomatoes upon a rose bush.

THE MAN. I fear that I am neither a horticulturist nor a Christian.

THE WOMAN. For years I have done everything possible to undermine my own rigid puritanism. I have steeped myself in current poetry and fiction. I have cultivated the acquaintances of the most depraved men upon my dinner list. The result has always been the same. They invariably reform and have the bad taste to attribute it to my influence.

THE MAN. I cannot pretend to advise you. My own career has been singularly blameless. But it occurs to me that one may often be influenced by the opinion of others.

THE WOMAN. Alas, my friends know me far too well. I have even laid myself open to the suspicion of tampering with the seventh commandment without occasioning my husband a moment's uneasiness. When I most brazenly expose myself to the breath of scandal, scandal,

I regret to say, holds its breath.

THE MAN. Your final act then is in the nature of a protest?

THE WOMAN. More than a protest. A vindication.

THE MAN. Quite so. And by what means do you intend to accomplish your purpose?

THE WOMAN. [*Fumbling in the sleeve of her opera cloak.*] I think they call it an automatic pistol. I took it from my husband's dressing case. Perhaps, you can instruct me in its use.

THE MAN. With the greatest pleasure.

THE WOMAN. [*A little taken aback.*] Oh!

THE MAN. I mean—

THE WOMAN. [*Handing him the pistol somewhat coolly.*] Thanks, very much.

THE MAN. [*After examing the pistol.*] It appears to be in working order, but where are the cartridges?

THE WOMAN. Cartridges? Cartridges? I don't think I quite understand.

THE MAN. Ha, ha! How devilishly like a woman.

THE WOMAN. I demand to be told what you are laughing at?

THE MAN. I regret to inform you that the pistol is not loaded.

THE WOMAN. Impossible! I thought they were always loaded. How else do all the accidents occur? Do you mean to say that I cannot kill myself with it after all?

THE MAN. I daresay, if you could manage to swallow it, you might possibly die of indigestion.

THE WOMAN. You are unwarrantably facetious. I can see nothing comic in being obliged to return home alive.

THE MAN. That will not be necessary. I can fortunately share with you my own infallible means of self-destruction. [*He produces a small bottle from his waistcoat pocket.*] Two grain tablets. I have quite enough to exterminate at least three tables of bridge.

THE WOMAN. After your display of levity at my expense, I cannot put myself under even temporary obligations to you.

THE MAN. As you like, of course.

THE WOMAN. May I see the bottle?

THE MAN. Certainly. [*He hands her the bottle.*]

THE WOMAN. [*After reading the label.*] Ha, ha, ha! How exquisitely like a man!

THE MAN. Pray be good enough to explain.

THE WOMAN. You have evidently picked up the wrong bottle.

THE MAN. Impossible! I picked it up in the dark. When one picks up a medicine bottle in the dark, one always gets the poison if there is any lying about.

THE WOMAN. [*Rising and handing back the bottle.*] This, however, contains only throat lozenges. I must bid you good-night.

THE MAN. Don't go! I shall think of something

presently. We might drown ourselves in the lagoon, for instance.

THE WOMAN. Do you swim?

THE MAN. It is one of my minor accomplishments, yes.

THE WOMAN. Then your suggestion is quite as futile as your recent assumption of superiority. The chivalrous instinct of the male animal would certainly assert itself. You would end by saving us both. Beside I should ruin my frock.

THE MAN. How like a woman. You are thinking only of appearances.

THE WOMAN. Is it not the function of the upper classes to set an example in the matters of neatness and economy?

THE MAN. Perhaps you are right. There is, of course, this lamp post. It would make an excellent gallows.

THE WOMAN. But we have no rope.

THE MAN. I have read somewhere of a French poet who managed to hang himself successfully with a pair of his mistress' garters.

THE WOMAN. [*Stiffly.*] If you have ever read the back pages of the magazines, you must realize that I cannot furnish the articles mentioned without at least partly disrobing.

THE MAN. I cannot for the moment think of anything else.

THE WOMAN. I fear you are gifted with a low imagination.

THE MAN. But what else can you suggest?

THE WOMAN. Since we cannot apparently avoid an otherwise unpardonable degree of familiarity, I might suggest your—your—

THE MAN. Suspenders?

THE WOMAN. Thank you.

THE MAN. My dear Madam, abstinence and rigorous exercise have thus far preserved my figure. I don't wear them.

THE WOMAN. How like a man! You have allowed your personal vanity to deprive you of a valuable aid in the gravest emergency.

THE MAN. Ha! I have it! May I examine that scarf of yours?

THE WOMAN. [*Unwinding the chiffon scarf from about her neck.*] How stupid of me not to have thought of it before. It is two yards and three-quarters in length. [*She hands him the scarf.*]

THE MAN. [*Testing its strength.*] Excellent! This ought to hold my weight nicely.

THE WOMAN. I hope you know how to go about it. A bungling attempt would, I am sure, prove most distressing.

THE MAN. I shall fasten the scarf just below the lamp. I shall then fasten the noose about my neck and jump from the back of the bench. Let me see—allowing for the give of the material, yes, it will do very nicely.

THE WOMAN. But afterward? What am I to do?

THE MAN. Unless you are more than ordinarily dense, you can easily imitate my procedure in every detail. You have only to take me down and unfasten the noose.

THE WOMAN. No! You have grossly overestimated my physical strength. I could never go through that part alone.

THE MAN. I had not thought of that.

THE WOMAN. It is your obvious duty as a gentleman to hang me first.

THE MAN. My dear Madam, I have always had an old fashioned compunction against even striking a woman. I ought not to be expected, at my age, to alter my principles to the extent of executing one in a public park.

THE WOMAN. You are most unkind.

THE MAN. Suppose at the very moment I had you neatly suspended we are subjected to an interruption by the park policeman.

THE WOMAN. Again you are thinking only of yourself.

THE MAN. I am not prepared to face a charge of murder simply for the sake of being polite.

THE WOMAN. [*Haughtily.*] Return me my scarf.

THE MAN. May I not first make use of it myself?

THE WOMAN. [*Sitting down again.*] Certainly not! Your own instincts of delicacy should prevent your asking a favor of one whose confidence you have so grossly abused.

THE MAN. [*Handing back the scarf.*] I am indeed sorry! But could you not return home and after a proper interval of rest repeat your attempt some other night?

THE WOMAN. No! In every well ordered existence there is but one hour and one place for the accomplishment of each fixed resolve. The briefest delay has often served to reduce an otherwise significant action to mere futile tragedy or burlesque.

THE MAN. I do not exactly follow you.

THE WOMAN. Eight years ago tonight, my husband proposed to me on this very bench. Tomorrow is the seventh anniversary of our wedding. He is a creature of habit and sentiment. Unless he reads of my death in the morning paper while he is eating his breakfast, I am sure the news will have very little effect on him.

THE MAN. Ha ha, ha! How confoundedly like a woman!

THE WOMAN. What are you laughing at now?

THE MAN. If you had taken the slightest trouble to inform yourself you would know that the last edition of the morning papers has already gone to press.

THE WOMAN. You are quite certain of what you say?

THE MAN. I am not in the habit of making reckless or incorrect assertions.

THE WOMAN. [*Rising.*] Then there is absolutely no point in carrying out my scheme. At least not until this time next year. You have saved me from committing a banality. I thank you. [*She extends her hand.*]

THE MAN. You are not going?

THE WOMAN. I can see no further occasion for remaining. I have detained you too long as it is. You may, however, keep my scarf.

THE MAN. Thanks, but I cannot allow you to trot about at this time of night unescorted. [*He glances at his watch.*] I have ordered a taxi to be waiting at the end of this path. It should be there now.

THE WOMAN. How like a man! You have provided for the possibility of altering your resolution at the last moment.

THE MAN. [*Cheerfully.*] Quite so! The prerogative is confined, I believe, to no particular race, age or sex.

THE WOMAN. You have forfeited your last claim to my respect. Are you weak or merely an inconsequent trifler?

THE MAN. I am both. I admit that I had no particular reason for departing this life. I am equally willing to admit that I see no particular reason for remaining alive other than—

THE WOMAN. Other than what?

THE MAN. Other than the desire to continue this acquaintance.

THE WOMAN. In a city of this size, we are, I am happy to say, quite unlikely to meet again.

THE MAN. [*Producing the card and pencil.*] On the contrary. I am not unknown in society. If you will be good enough to write your name and address, I daresay I can find some mutual acquaintance who will place me on your left at dinner in the near future. [*He hands her*

the card and pencil.] It is even possible that before the year is out I may be able to assist you upon the downward path.

THE WOMAN. It is really good of you to offer, but I fear that I am quite incorruptible. [*She writes upon the card.*]

THE MAN. I can only do my best.

THE WOMAN. [*Handing back the card.*] Here is the card. I feel, however, that you are only laying yourself open to an inevitable and blighting reformation.

THE MAN. You need have no fear on that score. I have always prided myself upon an utter lack of the moral sense. I cannot even distinguish between the Decalogue and the Decameron.

THE WOMAN. That is at least a ray of hope.

THE MAN. And now may I suggest that, although the morning papers have already gone to press, the cafes are still open. I would be charmed to have your company at supper, or shall we call it breakfast?

THE WOMAN. [*Drawing herself up.*] You presume upon our slight acquaintance. Without a more formal introduction, I could not think of accepting your hospitality. [*There is the sound of an auto horn.*] I shall, however, accept your offer of a conveyance.

THE MAN. Permit me to escort you then.

THE WOMAN. By no means. I am not a prude, but what would the driver of the taximeter think?

THE MAN. Does it matter what he thinks?

THE WOMAN. It is one of the obvious duties of cultivated persons like ourselves, to preserve the ethical illusions of the inferior classes. Without them, they would become quite unbearable.

THE MAN. You are doubtless right again.

THE WOMAN. [*Extending her hand.*] I trust you will not have far to walk. Good-night.

THE MAN. [*Shaking hands and bowing in a most formal manner.*] Good-night.

[THE WOMAN *adjusts her cloak and goes out in the direction indicated by the motor horn.* THE MAN *adjusts his eyeglasses and examines the card.*]

THE MAN. Um—ah—let me see! [*He looks at the card more closely.*] By Jove! 141 East ——— How deucedly convenient. I shall ask my wife to call on her.

CURTAIN

STAGE GUILD PLAYS

THE RED FLAG

A Comedy in One Act

THE RED FLAG was first produced by The Player's Workshop, Chicago, July 19, 1916, under the direction of Clarence Thomas, with the following cast:

COLLIN WEYLAND . . . . . E. Roslyn Kirkbride
MARNA SWANBRIDGE, his sister-in-law . . . . Helen Cook
JACK MARTIN . . . . . Edward Balzerit
ANTOINETTE, an elderly lady's maid . . . Margaret Allen
PROST, Collin Weyland's man-servant . . Donovan Yuell
THE REVEREND COMINGO BIRD . . . . . Clarence Thomas

THE RED FLAG

The Scene is the living room of Collin Weyland's summer home on the shore line somewhere between Bridgeport and New York. At the right are French windows, one of which is open, giving upon a bricked terrace. At the back is a large door opening into the main hall. At the left near the back is a glass door opening on the driveway. On the left wall near the front is a fireplace with a colonial mantel. The room is done in white with hangings of brilliant chintz. The assortment of furniture is an odd combination of winter and summer. It is evident that the house is now occupied the year round. The winter furniture looks as if it might have been brought from a bachelor apartment to supplement the other. There are several comfortable lounging chairs of wicker and one large leather arm chair near the fireplace. Near the French windows is a solid looking mahogany writing table. Beside the table is a chair on which are piled books and papers. ANTOINETTE *and* PROST *are standing on opposite sides of the table. She has in her hand a strip of red brocade which she is expecting to put on the table as a cover.* PROST *is objecting. As the curtain rises* COLLIN WEYLAND *enters from the hall with a light rain coat on his arm and a straw*

hat in his hand. He pauses in the doorway. The others do not notice him.

PROST. Well, I'm telling you something different to do.

ANTOINETTE. You needn't jump at me like that.

COLLIN. [*Putting down his hat and rain coat.*] Here, here! What's all this about?

PROST. [*Straightening up.*] Beg pardon, sir. Your writing things.

COLLIN. Well?

ANTOINETTE. I was only moving them to put on a new table-cover, Mr. Collin.

PROST. I was only telling her to let them be.

ANTOINETTE. You'd have thought from the way he talked that I was wanting to pour a can of kerosene in the piano and set a match to it.

PROST. And I'd not be surprised if that was the next little trick.

COLLIN. There now, Prost, that will do.

PROST. Beg pardon, sir, I'm sure, but being used mostly to gentlemen's clubs—

ANTOINETTE. [*To* COLLIN.] Mrs. Swanbridge thinks you shouldn't write down here no more on account of the draft. She's had a table put in the end room on the second hall.

PROST. Mr. Weyland can't write with the pumping engine directly under him. It has to run from nine to eleven regular.

COLLIN. We'll have to run it in the afternoon.

PROST. We did yesterday, and down comes word from Mrs. Swanbridge to shut it off,—couldn't get her nap.

ANTOINETTE. But the table cover?

COLLIN. Put it on, of course, if Mrs. Swanbridge says so.

PROST. And your papers, what's to be done with them?

COLLIN. Take them up to my own room.

[PROST *gathers up the papers and books from the chair and goes out by the hall door.* ANTOINETTE *spreads the table cover.*]

COLLIN. [*To* ANTOINETTE.] Well, where are Mrs. Swanbridge and Marna?

ANTOINETTE. Didn't they meet you at the station?

COLLIN. No.

ANTOINETTE. Prost was most particular about hurrying lunch. He was for sending them up in the motor but Mrs. Swanbridge likes the pony cart better.

COLLIN. No matter. I see you all got here safely.

ANTOINETTE. Yes, sir. Six-forty-two, day before yesterday.

COLLIN. Sorry I couldn't have been here. Hope Prost did everything to make you comfortable.

ANTOINETTE. Prost's all right in his way. He means well.

[MARNA *enters through the French window.*]

COLLIN. Hullo! Well, well!

MARNA. Colly! Good old boy!

COLLIN. Welcome!

MARNA. Oh, Colly, I'm sorry about the train. I wouldn't have flunked meeting you for worlds.

COLLIN. Fudge!

MARNA. It seemed as if mother had dozens of errands to do in the village. Where's your bag?

COLLIN. At the station. I'll send up for it.

MARNA. Let Antoinette phone out to the garage.

ANTOINETTE. Yes, Miss Marna. [*She starts for the door.*]

MARNA. Here's my hat.

COLLIN. Where's your mother?

MARNA. She forgot something up town. I got her to drop me at the gate.

COLLIN. Bully little chance to chat, eh?

MARNA. [*Sitting down in the large chair.*] Do you know you're looking awfully fit? Really, you are, positively puffy.

COLLIN. I can't see that you're fading away yourself.

MARNA. No old maid ever had a more encouraging brother-in-law.

COLLIN. No poor widower ever had a nicer sister.

MARNA. Rubbish!

COLLIN. Well, you're not much on letters. What do you know?

MARNA. Not a thing, except that we've all landed on you bag and baggage to spend the summer, just as usual.

COLLIN. How about the advice I gave you last fall?

MARNA. No, please, Colly, don't let's begin that. I don't know what got into me.

COLLIN. I know what got into you. A little spunk and grit and a good wholesome lack of that damnable quality of common sense.

MARNA. I've really come to feel about Jack just the way mother does.

COLLIN. Too bad!

MARNA. I'm sorry mother always irritates you so.

COLLIN. She doesn't always irritate me. She only irritates me when she's away. When she's here, she envelops me, she envelops the whole place, even Prost and the garage. She thinks for us, plans for us, almost eats for us. It's all so sweet and easy, we don't realize what's going on. We become a loose gelatinous mass actuated by her intelligence. She isn't an individual at all. She's sort of a damned community.

MARNA. You mustn't talk like that. Mother can't help it, really she can't. She's simply had to think and plan and arrange always.

COLLIN. Thinking and planning for other people is a dangerous thing. It gets a grip on you like—drink, or drugs or golf or any other perverted taste. You can't break away from it. You can't cure a victim of it.

All you can do is to try to alleviate the consequences to innocent bystanders.

MARNA. Mary and I were children when Father died. Mother had to bring us up.

COLLIN. To a certain age, yes, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one. After that she ought to have let you bring yourselves up the rest of the way. Mary was twenty-six when she married me. Don't I remember what happened. Your mother picked out her trousseau for her, passed on the bridesmaids, blackballed two of my pet friends for ushers, told us where to go on our honeymoon, picked out a house and furnished it for us. Sounds silly doesn't it, but it's true. Why, before we were through, we didn't dare select a bathroom mat for ourselves.

MARNA. Collin, you're absurd, really you are.

COLLIN. Am I? Listen to me. Did you ever have an allowance of your own? Did you ever keep house, or buy a railroad ticket or check a trunk, or hire a chauffeur, or discharge a cook?

MARNA. Of course, I have!

COLLIN. Yes, perhaps with express instructions as to every move.

MARNA. [*Rising.*] If you're going on like this all afternoon—

COLLIN. Just one thing more.

MARNA. Fire away then and get done with it.

COLLIN. Have you ever been away from your mother for more than a day or two at a time? Did she ever let

you get off and decide anything for yourself? Did you ever want to?

MARNA. I never heard such a lot of silly questions.

COLLIN. Oh, all right. Let it go at that. [*He turns on her abruptly.*] Marna, I've a surprise for you.

MARNA. What sort of a surprise?

COLLIN. Jack Martin came up on the train with me. He's staying at the Thorndike's.

MARNA. How beastly horrid of him.

COLLIN. Why? He's a free-born American citizen, isn't he?

MARNA. He knows mother can't abide him. He knows how I feel, too. I've written him twice. He ought to understand.

COLLIN. I asked Ben and Netty to have him up for the tennis.

MARNA. You ought to have known better.

COLLIN. I only wanted to give you both a run for the white alley.

MARNA. I'm going up to my room. I hope you're over your grouch when I come down.

[*She goes to the hall door.*]

COLLIN. Try a little walk later?

MARNA. Perhaps, if you behave yourself.

COLLIN. I give you fair warning, I'm going on the warpath. The worm's turned.

MARNA. Sometimes, I think you're a fool.

[*She goes out.* COLLIN *sits down in the large chair and looks moodily at the toes of his boots.* PROST *enters with a vase of flowers.*]

COLLIN. Prost.

PROST. Yes, sir.

COLLIN. Go up stairs again and get my papers.

PROST. Yes, sir.

COLLIN. And send Antoinette to take away that cover.

PROST. I quite understand, sir.

[PROST *goes to the hall door where he comes face to face with* ANTOINETTE.]

PROST. So there you are, are you? Mr. Weyland's got some orders for you.

[PROST *goes out.* ANTOINETTE *comes to the center of the room.* COLLIN *goes over to the writing table, sets the inkwells, blotter, et cetera, and folds up the table cover.*]

COLLIN. During the five summers that you and Mrs. Swanbridge have spent with me, have I ever raised my voice in protest or let a lamentation pass my lips?

ANTOINETTE. I'm sure, sir, I don't understand you.

COLLIN. You read your Bible, don't you?

ANTOINETTE. Regular, sir, night and morning.

COLLIN. Then you know all about the patience of camels and about the fatal weakness of their backs.

ANTOINETTE. I know something's mentioned.

COLLIN. [*Handing her the table cover.*] Well, here's the straw that did the trick.

ANTOINETTE. [*Helplessly.*] What am I to do with it?

COLLIN. Burn it! Make it into book-marks for the heathen! No, wait! Go out and hoist it on the flag pole. It's red. I want Mrs. Swanbridge to see it when she comes back.

ANTOINETTE. I'll take it right back to the sewing-room.

[*She hugs the table cover to her breast and starts for the hall door.*]

COLLIN. Hold on, I'm not through with you.

ANTOINETTE. Really, Mr. Collin, I've a heap of mending to do.

COLLIN. Come over here and sit down.

[*He pushes a chair toward her.* ANTOINETTE *hesitates and then sits down.* COLLIN *stands facing her.*]

COLLIN. Stick out your feet.

[ANTOINETTE *puts out her feet.*]

Just as I thought. You're still wearing those infernal felt boots.

ANTOINETTE. [*Plaintively.*] Really, Mr. Collin, I'm beginning to get used to them. I've wore them fourteen years come Christmas. Mrs. Swanbridge thinks they keep off my rheumatism.

COLLIN. And what do you think?

ANTOINETTE. I'm sure, sir, it ain't for me to think.

COLLIN. Exactly! How old are you?

ANTOINETTE. I'd be about sixty-one by my own reckoning.

COLLIN. Don't you think it's about time you retired from active lady's-maiding?

ANTOINETTE. Mrs. Swanbridge wouldn't hear of my leaving her, not for a long time yet. She's got it all planned, very nicely, too. I'm to last nine years more, which will give her time to get me into an old ladies' home. There's a long waiting list, but she's one of the governors.

COLLIN. Hm! Would you mind telling me whom you were with before you enlisted with my mother-in-law?

ANTOINETTE. I wasn't with anybody, sir; that is to say, not in service. I was with an opera company, I was. Come over to New York in 1880. I was a dancer. I'd have made my mark, too, only for a strained ligament in my knee.

COLLIN. Strained ligament. So that gave you the idea of taking to housework?

ANTOINETTE. I'd have took to worse if I hadn't met up with Mrs. Swanbridge.

COLLIN. [*Eagerly.*] Then she's always had this talent for managing other people's business?

ANTOINETTE. You wouldn't have had me be a painted Jezebel for the want of a little advice, would you?

COLLIN. That settles it. I've no more compunctions.

ANTOINETTE. Land of mercy, you ain't sick?

COLLIN. No, no! Answer me, have you ever been to the theater in the last thirty years?

ANTOINETTE. No, sir. Mrs. Swanbridge thinks it might unsettle my morals. She makes me put all my money in a savings bank. Lately, I've sort of lost my taste for 'em.

COLLIN. Savings banks?

ANTOINETTE. No, sir, theaters.

[PROST *enters with* COLLIN's *books and papers.*]

PROST. Your writing things, sir.

COLLIN. Put them back on the table.

PROST. Yes, sir, very good.

[*The door bell rings.* PROST *puts down the papers and goes to the door opening on the drive way.* COLLIN *paces up and down with his hands in his pockets.*]

ANTOINETTE. [*Meekly.*] Will that be all you want with me, sir?

COLLIN. Eh? No, certainly not. Don't go.

[*He continues his tramp.*]

PROST. [*Returning from the door.*] A note for Miss Swanbridge, sir. No answer.

[*He puts an emphasis on the "Miss."*]

COLLIN. Take it up to her room.

[PROST *goes out by the hall door.*]

COLLIN. [*Stopping abruptly and turning on* ANTOINETTE.] Ever have a vacation?

ANTOINETTE. Lord bless my soul, how you startle a body!

COLLIN. Ever ask for a vacation? Answer me.

ANTOINETTE. According to Mrs. Swanbridge, sir, it's only idle people that need vacations.

COLLIN. Perhaps she's right. You wouldn't know how to look out for yourself anyway.

ANTOINETTE. [*Showing a little spirit.*] I'm sure Mr. Collin, you've no call to think me a fool.

COLLIN. [*Egging her on.*] You wouldn't know what to do with a couple of weeks off.

ANTOINETTE. [*On her mettle.*] I would so. I've a niece with seven children living in Jersey City. I'd go to her. It would be a good rest for me.

COLLIN. [*Looking at his watch.*] Good! That's first rate! You're going on the three-thirty-five. John'll take you up in the motor. I'll give you all the money you need.

ANTOINETTE. [*Horrified.*] You're daft. Mrs. Swanbridge wouldn't hear of such a thing.

COLLIN. She won't hear of it, till after you're gone.

ANTOINETTE. I'd lose my place.

COLLIN. I'll guarantee to double your pay for life, if you do. Don't stand there wringing your hands. You've only got twenty minutes.

ANTOINETTE. You'd oughtn't to tempt me, sir, like this. I can't do it sir, I can't.

COLLIN. I'm offering you one lark to make up for thirty years Bible reading. I'll never lift my finger to help you again.

ANTOINETTE. [*Mournfully.*] I'll do what you want.

COLLIN. Run up and fetch your dunnage. You've got to be out of the house before the Admiral gets back.

[ANTOINETTE *moves slowly toward the hall door dabbing at her eyes with her apron.* COLLIN *goes to the house phone.* ANTOINETTE *goes out.*]

COLLIN. Garage? That you, John? Come around with the big car in five minutes. No, I want you to drive. Yes, that's right.

[MARNA *enters from the hall with a letter in her hand just as* COLLIN *hangs up the receiver.*]

MARNA. What's Antoinette crying about?

COLLIN. Don't know. Perhaps she's been reading the funny papers.

MARNA. Don't be ridiculous. I want to talk with you.

COLLIN. Shoot! I'm quite at your mercy.

MARNA. Do you know what's in this letter?

COLLIN. Haven't the faintest idea.

MARNA. It's from Jack Martin. It's impertinent. It's childish. Oh, Colly, you've gotten me into a rotten mess. Listen to what he says. [*Reads from the letter.*] "Staying at the Thorndikes for two weeks. Give you fair warning old bluffs no longer good. Intend to win in spite of Dragon. Will begin by coming to tea," signed "Jack". It sounds like a cable at two dollars a word!

COLLIN. I call it very straightforward and to the point.

MARNA. You married men always seem to think you know so much about unmarried women.

COLLIN. Well, why not?

MARNA. If I have to think of dodging Jack every day for two whole weeks I shall end by hating him.

COLLIN. [*Somewhat taken aback.*] Never thought of that. See here, let's get right down to brass tacks. Why can't you make up your mind and get it over with cleanly and quietly?

MARNA. How many times do I have to tell you my mind is made up.

COLLIN. Honest? Cross your heart? Hope to die?

MARNA. No, it isn't. Oh, Colly, what am I going to do?

COLLIN. Give the matter your serious undivided attention without consulting the Major-General.

MARNA. If I could only get away.

COLLIN. Right oh! Why not? Run upstairs and throw a few things into a suit case.

MARNA. Don't be an idiot! You're not helping me a bit.

COLLIN. I've just prescribed the same thing to another patient.

MARNA. Then you're out of your senses. [*A pause.*] I couldn't just go knock about with a suit case.

COLLIN. Certainly not. Settle down somewhere for a couple of weeks. Wait, why not try Lucy's?

MARNA. Never do in the world. I might go to Nan. She's always at me to visit her and she's sure to be home on account of the children.

COLLIN. Perfect! Where does she live?

MARNA. Only about thirty miles from here. They've taken Polly Hempstead's house.

COLLIN. Couldn't be better. I can run you up there in the roadster in fifty minutes.

MARNA. It is an idea. I'll ask mother directly she gets back. I don't suppose she'd mind very much.

COLLIN. No, we daren't risk it. Take my word, if your mother gets to talking to you, the whole thing flivvers out.

[*A pause.*]

MARNA. I couldn't just bump down on Polly with a suit case without letting her know.

COLLIN. You'll have to. I'll send John up with your steamer trunk tomorrow.

MARNA. I'd have to tell mother where I was going.

COLLIN. Leave that to me.

MARNA. But what about Jack?

COLLIN. Perhaps just a hint to run up to Nan's in about ten days, eh?

MARNA. Not before that? Honor bright?

COLLIN. Honor bright.

MARNA. Oh, how I wish I dared—

[PROST *enters from the hall.*]

PROST. Mr. Bird, sir, waiting to see Mrs. Swanbridge.

COLLIN. Bird? Confound it, what Bird?

PROST. [*Consulting a card in his hand.*] "The Reverend Comingo Bird."

COLLIN. I don't believe it. It sounds too tropical and unworldly.

MARNA. It's the new curate at the Episcopal Chapel.

COLLIN. What does he mean by flapping around here? He ought to be back in his aviary—garage—damn it, what's the word?—rectory.

PROST. I can't say, sir.

COLLIN. What were you planning to do with him?

PROST. To bring him in here, sir, there being no alternative.

[PROST *goes toward the door.*]

COLLIN. Tell him to go to the ——. [PROST *goes out.*] This is the devil! He'll keep you here talking till your mother comes.

MARNA. I shan't wait to see him. I'll slip out and up the back stairs.

COLLIN. Then it's a go?

MARNA. The one real prank of my life. [*She goes toward the French window.*]

COLLIN. I'll ditch Birdy in five minutes and meet you at the back door.

[MARNA *goes out.* COLLIN *goes to the hall door and meets the curate just as he enters.*]

PROST. [*Outside.*] Be good enough to step this way, sir.

[BIRD *enters. He is a large awkward young man with the general look of a heavy-weight prize fighter. He is dressed in neat clerical clothes.*]

COLLIN. Glad to see you, Mr. Bird. I'm Collin Weyland, Mrs. Swanbridge's son-in-law.

BIRD. [*Extending a large hand and speaking in a small sweet voice.*] Truly, Mr. Weyland, I owe you an apology for this intrusion, but I had an appointment with Mrs. Swanbridge at half after three.

COLLIN. She'll be back presently. Won't you sit down.

BIRD. [*Sitting down.*] Thanks.

COLLIN. You're the new Episcopal clergyman, aren't you?

BIRD. I am at present the incumbent of that position locally.

COLLIN. Do you smoke?

BIRD. Well—er—at times—not infrequently.

COLLIN. [*Offering a cigarette box.*] A cigarette?

BIRD. Does—er—Mrs. Swanbridge object?

COLLIN. I've always hoped so.

BIRD. I must say, Mr. Weyland, I don't follow you.

COLLIN. It's evident you don't know the Admiral then.

BIRD. The Admiral?

COLLIN. It's a pet name I have for Mrs. Swanbridge on account of her executive ability.

BIRD. The Bishop *did* lay especial stress upon Mrs. Swanbridge's tendency in that direction.

COLLIN. You've been warned then.

BIRD. I'm sure there was no occasion. I shall be deeply grateful for any help and advice in all matters pertaining to the parish and so will Mrs. Bird.

COLLIN. I want to remind you at the outset that my mother-in-law is not a resident of this town, that she isn't even strictly speaking a member of your congregation, that she has no right whatsoever to impose her advice on you or Mrs. Bird.

BIRD. My dear sir, I beg you not to take my chance remark about the Bishop so much to heart.

COLLIN. I do take it to heart. I take it very much to heart.

BIRD. I can only apologize. I assure you I was not attempting a pleasantry. I will be most sincerely grateful.

COLLIN. You mustn't be grateful. It's exactly what I don't want you to be. It's the first fatal concession, the first step in the process of mental absorption. If you allow yourself to be grateful you're lost.

BIRD. [*Rising.*] You appear to attribute some sort of hypnotic power to Mrs. Swanbridge. Either that or—

COLLIN. [*Rising also.*] Well?

BIRD. Or, I regret to say it, you must be laboring under the influence of stimulants.

COLLIN. I give you my word I haven't touched a drop since lunch.

BIRD. In either case, I think it best to end this extraordinary interview.

COLLIN. There's one thing I'd like to ask you first—

BIRD. [*Moving toward the door.*] My presence seems to throw you into a curious nervous state.

COLLIN. Tell me what you came to see Mrs. Swanbridge about. On my honor, I'm only trying to help you.

BIRD. Well, sir, if it will serve to set your mind at rest, I came to discuss the subject of candles.

COLLIN. Candles?

BIRD. I repeat sir, candles. There's nothing uncouth or ridiculous in the discussion of candles.

COLLIN. But what sort of candles? Kitchen candles? Ordinary tallow candles? Parafine candles? Candles for a birthday cake?

BIRD. No, sir! Wax candles. Candles for the Chapel, altar candles. The idea seems to amuse you.

COLLIN. I was never more serious in my life.

BIRD. I believe in the formalities of worship. They lend an atmosphere which has undoubted value in impressing weak and unstable intellects. Candles I consider of immense importance.

COLLIN. I'll have to take your word for that.

BIRD. Unfortunately there are no funds available. The expense can only be defrayed by private subscrip-

tions, so I wrote to Mrs. Swanbridge about it.

COLLIN. And what was her answer?

BIRD. I regret to say she characterized the idea as relating to unnecessary frills. I thought, however, if I could see her and explain—

COLLIN. Is your heart really set on these candles, Mr. Bird?

BIRD. I feel that I cannot do myself justice without them.

COLLIN. Then go out and order them at once without consulting her.

BIRD. I would rather give her the opportunity to alter her mind.

COLLIN. You might as well ask the Washington Monument to dance the tango.

BIRD. I trust I possess some firmness of character.
[JACK MARTIN *enters by the French window.*]

COLLIN. Give me your word not to mention candles to Mrs. Swanbridge and I'll promise to pay for all you can burn while you're in the parish.
[JACK *goes to the table and picks up a book.*]

BIRD. Am I to take your offer seriously?

COLLIN. Absolutely. [*He motions Jack.*] The deuce!

JACK. Don't let me disturb you. I'll just frog around till you're through.

COLLIN. It's all right. Let me introduce you to Mr. Flamingo.

BIRD. Comingo.

COLLIN. Mr. Comingo Bird. This is my friend, Jack Martin.

JACK. Glad to know you.

BIRD. Thanks. [*To* COLLIN.] I will take no more of your time, Mr. Weyland.

COLLIN. You've decided not to tackle the Admiral?

BIRD. Your generosity has made it unnecessary. Good afternoon.

[*He goes to the hall door.*]

COLLIN. You'd better keep off the main road to the village. She's out prowling around in the ponycart. If you get home without her bagging you, telephone me and I'll send you a check for the frills.

BIRD. Thanks, I'll take your advice.

[*He goes out.*]

JACK. What was he doing here?

COLLIN. Who?

JACK. Your parson with the ornothological name.

COLLIN. Just a little church business.

JACK. It gave me the deuce of a turn. I thought you might be planning to marry us before tea.

COLLIN. You're not beginning to funk the game, are you?

JACK. [*Miserably.*] I don't know. I've been thinking a lot since this morning. I don't like that note you made me send Marna, the one you dictated on the

train. It sounded—well so sort of brutal and peremptory. I'm afraid you have put me in worse than I was before.

COLLIN. You don't know Marna as well as I do. There's nothing to cry about.

JACK. Everything seemed to be so—well, so sort of settled. Not the way I wanted it to be, of course, but in a way there's a satisfaction in having made up your mind to the worst. I was getting quite used to it.

COLLIN. That's no way to talk.

JACK. I know how Mrs. Swanbridge feels about me.

COLLIN. That's why I put in the allusion to the Dragon.

JACK. That's what worries me most. I don't want to seem disrespectful to Marna's mother. I want to show her every consideration.

COLLIN. Has she ever shown you any consideration?

JACK. Of course, she has. We had a long talk in January, at the Holland House. She was very charming and sympathetic. She made me see clear as day that I was out of the question as a son-in-law, that Marna really didn't care for me enough to marry me.

COLLIN. Have you ever pressed Marna for her own opinion since January ?

JACK. Certainly not. I've some pride. If I'm not wanted, I'm not wanted, that's all there is to it.

COLLIN. If that's the way you feel about it, what did you come here for?

JACK. That's what I've been trying to ask you. You

got me here. It's up to you to put things straight.

COLLIN. If I do, will you give me your solemn oath never to take another piece of advice from any member of this family, including myself, as long as you live?

JACK. That's an extraordinary promise.

COLLIN. Take it or leave it.

JACK. Done.

COLLIN. Good. Now for your instructions. You're to stay with the Thorndikes your full two weeks. You're to come over here every morning and every afternoon. You're to see just as much of Mrs. Swanbridge as you possibly can and you're to make it a point to differ with her on every point that comes up. Don't give way an inch.

JACK. Do you take me for an absolute ass?

COLLIN. I most certainly do.

JACK. Then I can't see why you're so damned keen to have me for a brother-in-law.

COLLIN. I wouldn't give a lead nickel for the pleasure of having you. The point is if you and Marna want each other, I'm going to put the thing through without let or hindrance.

JACK. I must say if you're only doing this to spite Mrs. Swanbridge I call it a low trick all round.

COLLIN. I tell you flat, my son, I care more for the Admiral than I care for you and Marna rolled into one.

JACK. Then why in the name of everything holy are are you laying yourself out to put her on the blink.

COLLIN. I'm only trying to make it possible for us to live with her in peace harmony and happiness.

JACK. But she'll never stand for my hanging about here with Marna.

COLLIN. Damn it all, Marna hasn't anything to do with it. You won't see her. She's going away now, this afternoon, right away.

JACK. What for?

COLLIN. To think, you poor egg, to think for two weeks with her own mind, if she has one; to get away from the Admiral.

JACK. Did you put her up to it?

COLLIN. I blackguarded her into it.

JACK. [*Making a grab for* COLLIN'S *hand.*] Colly, you're a brick!

COLLIN. But look you, I had to promise she'd be free from all interference; that includes you. I'll let you see her off but you're only to press her hand and say: "I meant every word of that note."

JACK. [*Repeating.*] "I meant every word of that note."

COLLIN. Look her straight in the eyes when you say it and trust time to do the rest.

JACK. I think I understand.

[ANTOINETTE *has been standing patiently beside her straw-suitcase at the hall door.* PROST *enters.*]

ANTOINETTE. I'm ready, Mr. Collin, if the motor is.

COLLIN. Eh?

PROST. The motor's waiting, sir.

COLLIN. What's the fare to Hoboken?

ANTOINETTE. Jersey City.

COLLIN. Prost?

PROST. I couldn't say, sir.

[MARNA *enters by the French window. She is dressed for motoring.*]

COLLIN. [*Handing* PROST *a bill.*] Never mind. Here's twenty. Take Antoinette up to the station, buy her a ticket, put her on the next train and give her the change.

PROST. Yes, sir.

[MARNA *has hesitated by the window as if about to slip out again. But* COLLIN *notices her.*]

COLLIN. Hullo! Marna, I'll be with you in a moment.

[*He takes his dust coat and hat from* PROST *who has picked them up from the chair.* MARNA *advances slowly and reluctantly to meet* JACK.]

MARNA. How are you, Jack?

JACK. [*Nervously glancing at* COLLIN.] Fine, thanks. Perfectly bully.

[JACK *grasps her hand and looks fixedly into her eyes.*]

PROST. [*To* COLLIN.] Will that be all, sir?

COLLIN. Yes. Come on, Marna. We haven't a minute to spare.

[PROST *picks up* ANTOINETTE'S *suit case.*]

MARNA. [*To* JACK.] I'm sorry to run off like this the moment you get here.

JACK. I—I meant every word of that note.

MARNA. [*Withdrawing her hand.*] How horrid of you!

COLLIN. [*Going toward the French window.*] This way out. Don't forget your parcels.

[*He comes face to face with* BIRD *who enters in breathless haste.*]

BIRD. [*Gasping for breath.*] Thank heaven, I've found you all here.

COLLIN. Well, what do *you* want?

MARNA. Has something happened?

JACK. Nothing serious, I hope.

BIRD. [*Still gasping.*] I—I have a terrible stitch in my side.

ANTOINETTE. Lord love us, is that all you've got to tell?

MARNA. [*To* PROST.] Get Mr. Bird a glass of water.

BIRD. Quite unnecessary, I assure you. I'm quite myself again.

COLLIN. Then, perhaps, you'll be good enough to explain.

BIRD. Mrs. Swanbridge has met with an accident.

MARNA. Mother?

JACK. The devil she has!

ANTOINETTE. Oh, God have mercy! She's been killed, struck down!

COLLIN. Wait. Give Mr. Bird a chance.

MARNA. Quick! Tell me! What's happened?

BIRD. I was taking the first turn to the right after leaving the front gate, when I saw Mrs. Swanbridge approaching in an open conveyance drawn by a pony.

ANTOINETTE. It's a judgment on me for thinking to leave her!

BIRD. Just at that moment a large green motor car—I couldn't tell you the make—swept around the curve. The pony became frightened. The conveyance was overturned and Mrs. Swanbridge was thrown heavily to the ground.

ANTOINETTE. I knew it!

BIRD. I succeeded in taking the number of the car.

JACK. Never mind the number of the car.

MARNA. Is she badly hurt?

BIRD. I'm glad to say she was not. Before running for assistance I ascertained, with her help of course, that it was nothing more serious than a wrenched knee. I left her propped against a tree reading the last number of the Churchman.

MARNA. You're quite sure it is not worse than you've told us?

BIRD. My dear young lady, a little care and nursing for a couple of weeks and Mrs. Swanbridge will be quite herself again, I haven't a doubt of it.

COLLIN. [*In a resigned voice.*] Neither have I.

ANTOINETTE. I'll run upstairs and get her bed ready.

MARNA. [*To* PROST.] Send John up for the motor.

PROST. Yes, miss.

JACK. Come on, Colly. We'll go down and fetch her in.

COLLIN. Wait, one moment, all of you. Before we render first aid to the injured, I've got something to say.

MARNA. Please!

JACK. For Heaven's sake, this is no time to be funny.

COLLIN. I've wasted a lot of breath this afternoon giving foolish advice. While you're all here I want to take it back, wipe it out. I've learned my limitations. I feel the hand of Destiny. I'm slipping back. We're all slipping back and there's no help for it. As an understudy to Providence, I've completely flivvered out.

JACK. I say, do you realize she's still out there in the ditch.

BIRD. I must say, Mr. Weyland—

COLLIN. One thing more. Where's Antoinette?

ANTOINETTE. I'm here, sir.

COLLIN. Go out and run down the red flag.

MARNA. What flag?

COLLIN. I mean fetch it back.

ANTOINETTE. What back?

COLLIN. Why the table cover, of course.

[*They all stand for a moment looking at* COLLIN *as if he had gone crazy.*]

CURTAIN

STAGE GUILD PLAYS

THE PARTING

A Melodrama

THE PARTING was first produced at the Theater of the Carnegie Institute of Technology, under the direction of B. Iden Payne, with the following cast:

CHARACTERS

MAX, a Prussian Spy.....James Church
PERE RIGAUD, a Concierge.....Howard McClenahan
HENRI FAUTRELLE, a lame Cobbler..David S. Gaither
GABRIELLE, a young French actress.....Alma Lind

THE PARTING

The Time is 1871.

The Place is an attic room in Pere Rigaud's house. It is comfortably furnished, considering its location. At the actor's left a door near the back. This opens on to the hallway and stairs. Between the door and the audience a fireplace with a fire burning. On the mantel, two tall brass candlesticks with lighted candles. There is a small dormer window at the back and at the right a large window in a recess. This window opens upon the roofs. It is above the level of the floor and there is a step which enables the lodger to use it as a doorway. There is a table near the center of the stage. On one end of the table is a tray with dishes, on the other an ordinary wicker cage with two white pigeons in it. MAX *is feeding the birds and talking to them.*

MAX. So, you're tired of your cage, eh? Well, it won't be long now. You only need a little more patience.

[*There is a knock at the door.* MAX *becomes suddenly alert. He takes up the cage and goes swiftly to the large window sets the cage outside on the roof. He then goes to the door and opens it.* RIGAUD, *the concierge, enters.*]

MAX. Oh! It's you, is it? [*He shuts the door.*]

THE CONCIERGE. Yes, it's me. Who did you think it was, the gendarmes? I've come for your supper tray. And let me tell you one thing, M'sieur Max, you won't get another supper like that in Paris till the siege is over. Not for five francs, no, nor fifteen. There's not a sou's worth of food coming in from the outside. Your Prussian friends have us corked up like flies in a bottle.

MAX. Haven't I told you to be careful what you say?

THE CONCIERGE. And you don't have to tell me again. I'm careful right enough. They won't get old Father Rigaud up in front of a firing squad, no, no! And just as an extra precaution, I'll thank you to change your lodgings, my gay young friend. Yes, and take your birds along with you.

MAX. What do you mean by that?

THE CONCIERGE. I mean that I'm tired of harboring a spy and his carrier pigeons, that's what I mean.

MAX. You've become suddenly virtuous, eh?

THE CONCIERGE. Call it what you want to. I can wink at a good deal when I get triple pay for an attic like this. My mother was born in the Rhine country, too, so I'm not over particular if the money does come out of the Prussian pockets. But it's every man for himself, that's my motto.

MAX. [*Coolly.*] See here! I've had about enough of your insolence.

THE CONCIERGE. We'll both have too much of something else if you don't mind what I'm telling you. There was an officer here this afternoon. He made me bring him up to have a look at your room.

MAX. [*Lighting a cigarette.*] So, that's what

frightened you, eh? Well, I'm fool enough to leave anything lying about except a nice set of English letters and passports.

THE CONCIERGE. How about the pigeons? I know you keep the cage hidden behind the chimney pots, but there's other windows that open on to the roofs beside this one.

MAX. I know you mean Henri Fautrelle, the lame cobbler, in the second attic from here. Why the man's half blind! I've never seen him look up from his work.

THE CONCIERGE. [*Slyly.*] And Mad'moiselle Gabrielle?

MAX. [*Looking up sharply.*] Who?

THE CONCIERGE. The little actress from the Theatre Houdin that lives next door, eh? How about her?

MAX. Bosh! She thinks I'm a special correspondent for some of the London newspapers. You needn't worry about her.

THE CONCIERGE. But I'll bet fifty francs she'll miss you, eh? Ho, ho!

MAX. Is that any of your damned business?

THE CONCIERGE. Easy, now, easy! I was young once myself, but all the same out you go; and the lady can go with you if she likes. That's her own affair.

MAX. Have it your own way then. [*He glances at his watch.*] It's half after eight. I've an appointment to meet one of my men at the corner of the Boulevard in fifteen minutes. If he has the information I've been waiting for, I'll come straight back and send off the pigeons tonight. If he hasn't, I won't come back at all. You can pack my things and store them for me. Does that satisfy you?

THE CONCIERGE. Perfectly. And if your pigeons are still here in the morning, they go into the soup.

MAX. I'll take care of them.

THE CONCIERGE. There's one thing you've forgotten.

MAX. Your money, eh? Well, here's five hundred francs for you.

THE CONCIERGE. It would be easier to keep quiet, M'sieur, for a thousand, since it's not out of your own pocket.

MAX. In that case, we'll make it fifteen hundred.

THE CONCIERGE. A thousand—no—fifteen hundred, thanks.

MAX. Now get out of here.

THE CONCIERGE. With the greatest of pleasure, Herr Lieutenant Von Wittingen.

[*He goes out with the tray.*]

[MAX *follows the* CONCIERGE *to the door, shuts it after him and turns the key. Then he goes swiftly to the large window, leans out and whistles softly. Evidently receiving an answer, he takes the cage from the roof outside the window and returns with it to the center table. In a moment* GABRIELLE *appears in the window. She steps down into the room and runs to* MAX *holding out both her hands.*]

GABRIELLE. Max, I thought you'd forgotten me.

MAX. [*Taking her hands.*] Good! I was afraid you'd left for the theater.

GABRIELLE. I only have a tiny bit in the second act of the new play. We can chat for half an hour. Shall I make coffee?

MAX. I'm sorry, but I have to be going out, in about ten minutes.

GABRIELLE. But you'll come for me after the play and bring me home?

MAX. I'm afraid not—tonight.

GABRIELLE. *Eh, bien*, some other time then.

MAX. I'm sorry—

GABRIELLE. [*A little hurt.*] It's all right. There's no harm done.

MAX. Gabrielle, I want you to do something for me.

GABRIELLE. What is it?

MAX. I have to leave these lodgings,—perhaps tonight, at any rate, first thing in the morning. There's to be a sortie by the garrison. I have to follow it and write it up for my paper. I may not be able to come back at all even to fetch away my things. I've left orders about them with Pere Rigaud. But if I am not back before twelve o'clock tonight I want you to come over and get this cage.

GABRIELLE. Your pigeons?

MAX. Yes, I want you to keep them for me until I can come for them or send a man with a letter. No one else is to touch them.

GABRIELLE. I understand. When you've seen my poor compatriots, killed and maimed by the Prussians and written a terrible story about the fighting, you'll tie it to one of these innocent white creatures and they'll fly back with it to your English newspaper so that snug stay-at-homes can gloat about it over their tea cups. Oh, it's beastly!

MAX. I don't know yet. If I can get through the

lines, I may try to leave Paris myself.

GABRIELLE. Then it's over.

MAX. How do you mean—over?

GABRIELLE. Between us. . . .

MAX. That depends. Perhaps after the Prussians have taken Paris. . . .

GABRIELLE. No, no! They'll never do that—never!

MAX. Well, then we'll say after the war—

GABRIELLE. We're not children. We needn't lie to ourselves. If we say good-bye, let's say it quite frankly. We both know what it means well enough.

MAX. I'm—I'm glad you don't take it too hard.

GABRIELLE. Oh, you men! You were afraid I'd cry and hang on your neck. Well, women aren't all alike. I can teach you that.

MAX. [*Moved in spite of himself.*] By God, do you know I almost wish we'd never seen each other across the roofs.

GABRIELLE. Do you?

MAX. Or at least that we'd never found how easy it was to cross the leads between our two windows.

GABRIELLE. I don't. It's meant almost six months of being—not quite so lonesome. I've had that much out of it.

MAX. You're a queer girl. I can't make you out. Don't even know whether you love me or not.

GABRIELLE. After all, what difference does it make now?

MAX. Gabrielle—

GABRIELLE. We've had our quiet hours looking off over the wonderful old roofs. But it doesn't matter what I've given you or what we've been to each other. Whatever we said, we knew all the time that it was all—all temporary. Even that first night when we watched the rockets going up over Mont Parnasse we could have told each other that it was bound to end sometime—just like this.

MAX. I won't let you talk as if our—our friendship had been nothing but a common affair.

GABRIELLE. And why not? I haven't cheated myself into thinking it was ever anything else. I'm glad I didn't. It somehow makes things easier.

MAX. [*Trying to draw her to him.*] I don't believe you. I'll make you take that back.

GABRIELLE. No, no, please. It's better for you to go now, right away.

MAX. I can't stand this. I tell you it doesn't seem human.

GABRIELLE. It's—it's best for us both.

MAX. Have it your own way, then.

[*He releases her and picks up his coat and hat from a chair.*]

GABRIELLE. Good-bye and good luck to you! I'll take care of the pigeons for you.

[MAX *takes her hand half doubtfully, then suddenly draws her to him, kisses her and as suddenly releases her. He goes out and shuts the door behind him.* GABRIELLE *gives a choked sob, clasps her hands, and takes a couple of steps toward the closed door as if to call* MAX *back; then controls herself and returns to the center table, picks up the wicker*

bird cage, blows out the lamp and moves toward the larger window as if intending to replace the cage on the roof. The figure of FAUTRELLE *appears in the window.* GABRIELLE *draws back startled.*]

FAUTRELLE. One moment, Madmoiselle.

GABRIELLE. Who—who is it?

FAUTRELLE. Give me time. Give me time. Where's the step?

[*He feels before him with a cane.*]

Yes, yes. Well, well, now I have it.

[*He steps down into the room. In his other hand he carries another wicker cage exactly like the one belonging to* MAX. *In it there are also two white pigeons.*]

GABRIELLE. [*Recognizing him.*] I didn't know you at first. You frightened me.

FAUTRELLE. That's a pity! That's a pity! I suppose you thought I was a thief. Well, well, but you know me now, don't you?

GABRIELLE. You're Henri Fautrelle, the lame cobbler.

FAUTRELLE. It's not my first venture on the roofs. You thought it took young people like you and M'sieur Max—lovers, eh? —to scramble over the leads and between the chimney pots—that's it, lovers. Well, well, you were mistaken. [*He stands wagging his head.*]

GABRIELLE. Now that you're here, what do you want?

FAUTRELLE. Only to exchange what I have in my hand for what you have in yours.

GABRIELLE. I don't know what you're talking about.

FAUTRELLE. I have here a common wicker cage exactly like yours. In it are two white pigeons exactly like yours. It would take an expert bird fancier to tell the difference. A fair exchange, eh? And if you're the sensible girl I take you to be, you'll say nothing to M'sieu' Max when he comes back to fetch the birds from you.

GABRIELLE. You—you were listening at the window.

FAUTRELLE. Yes, yes, and I've listened before. I know that you're a loyal French woman, Mademoiselle. I haven't the slightest doubt of you. Otherwise, I'd hardly be here talking. No, no, I'd have gone straight to the officers of the Secret Service with a little story about a young foreigner who keeps carrier pigeons hidden on the roof of Pere Rigaud's house.

GABRIELLE. You're crazy.

FAUTRELLE. Yes, yes, that's quite possible, but all the same—

GABRIELLE. Monsieur Max is—is English. He's special correspondent for one of the London papers.

FAUTRELLE. Yes, yes, that may all be, but when your M'sieu' Max tosses his little pets into the air each with a bit of paper rolled about its leg, I must be sure—

GABRIELLE. Sure of what?

FAUTRELLE. That they don't fly straight to General Von Moltke at the Prussian Headquarters, Mademoiselle, with the latest reports concerning the garrison of Paris.

GABRIELLE. No, no, no! I don't believe it. It isn't true. It's all a crazy lie.

FAUTRELLE. [*Advancing a step.*] Come now. Give me that cage like a good girl.

GABRIELLE. If you come a step nearer, I'll scream.

FAUTRELLE. I advise you not to.

GABRIELLE. How do I know you are not a Prussian spy yourself?

FAUTRELLE. There is an easy way of settling that question. We can take both cages to the nearest commissioner of police.

GABRIELLE. I swear to you by the blessed image—

FAUTRELLE. Come, come, my dear. I'm an old man and I have a soft heart, softer than you'd think, otherwise I should have reported M'sieur Max weeks ago. Perhaps I am a fool for not doing it. But I know how hard it is for a man that's unjustly suspected to clear himself. These birds of mine came from my brother who lives inside the fortifications. If they fly back to him with nothing worse than a report for an English newspaper, your lover is quite safe. In the meantime, I'll take my chance.

GABRIELLE. If—if—I thought Max was a spy, I'd —I'd kill him with my own hands. But I don't—I don't—it isn't true. I tell you it can't be true.

FAUTRELLE. Maybe not, maybe not. But if it isn't, there'll be no harm done and no one the wiser.

GABRIELLE. I've given my word.

FAUTRELLE. You promised to come back here at twelve o'clock for a cage of pigeons. You can still keep your word.

[GABRIELLE *hesitates.*]

Come, come, I've given you your choice.

[GABRIELLE *steps to the center table and sets down her cage.*]

GABRIELLE. Take them, then.

FAUTRELLE. There, there, that's better.

[*He goes to the table sets down his own cage takes up the other and moves a few steps toward the window with it.*]

GABRIELLE. But if he knows the cage—if it's marked in some way—

FAUTRELLE. Yes, yes, I've thought of that. I'll just take these little pets to my own room and wring their pretty necks. Then I'll come back to the window and if the coast is clear, I'll fetch M'sieur Max's own cage and we'll change, to be on the safe side.

GABRIELLE. [*Wringing her hands.*] Oh, blessed Mary, I don't know what I've done.

FAUTRELLE. Nothing you'll be sorry for, my dear, and we'll pray to the kind God that you'll live to thank old Henri Fautrelle—both of you.

[FAUTRELLE *clambers out the window and disappears.* GABRIELLE *remains standing perfectly still for a moment looking at the empty window, then turns to the table and looks curiously at the new cage of pigeons. She turns back to the window and takes a few steps toward it as if to call* FAUTRELLE, *then hearing someone on the stairs, she turns and goes toward the door. Before she can reach it, it opens and* MAX *enters.*]

GABRIELLE. Max! You've come back after all.

MAX. So! You're still here, are you?

GABRIELLE. You—you act as if you hoped I'd be gone.

MAX. [*Almost roughly.*] No. But I haven't time to talk now.

GABRIELLE. Is anything wrong?

MAX. No, no, nothing. It's all right. Just listen at the head of the stairs, will you, and see if Madame Rigaud's prowling around on the lower landing.

[GABRIELLE *goes out onto the stair landing for a moment.* MAX *sits down at the center table. He is visibly nervous. He takes out a few scraps of paper from his pocket and spreads them before him on the table.*]

GABRIELLE. [*Returning from the hallway and closing the door after her.*] There's nobody on the stairs.

MAX. [*Copying rapidly on a small piece of paper.*] Leave the door open so that we can hear anyone coming up.

[GABRIELLE *opens the door.*]

Now look out the small window and see who's standing in the street.

[*He goes on writing.* GABRIELLE *goes to the window and looks into the street.* MAX *continues writing rapidly.*]

MAX. Well?

GABRIELLE. A man standing under a lamp post.

MAX. [*Still writing.*] Which lamp post?

GABRIELLE. The second from the corner, across the street.

MAX. Has he got on a light overcoat?

GABRIELLE. I—I can't quite see.

MAX. Confound it, what have you got eyes for.

[*He rises, half angrily, and goes to the window.*]

As he does so, he brushes one of the loose sheets of paper off the table onto the floor.]

GABRIELLE. [*Coming away from the window and passing* MAX *as he goes toward it.*] You've never spoken to me like that before.

MAX. [*Without turning.*] I'm sorry, but I'm in the devil of a hurry.

GABRIELLE. Whom do you expect to see in the street?

[*Her eyes falls on the sheet of paper on the floor and she instinctively picks it up.*]

MAX. [*Peering cautiously between the curtains.*] It's all right, only a man I've been talking to.

GABRIELLE. Another correspondent for a London newspaper?

MAX. [*Still at the window.*] Yes.

[GABRIELLE *glances at* MAX *and then at the piece of paper in her hand. Her face changes and she gives a little gasp of pain.*]

MAX. [*Turning from the window.*] What's the matter?

GABRIELLE. Nothing, nothing at all.

[*She crumples the paper in her clinched hand.*]

MAX. What have you got in your hand?

GABRIELLE. Nothing. Only a piece of paper that blew off your table just now.

MAX. Give it to me.

[GABRIELLE *holds out her hand and* MAX *takes the crumpled piece of paper. He goes quickly to the fireplace and throws it into the fire.*]

MAX. You've no right to look at letters that don't belong to you.

GABRIELLE. I tell you I only picked it up from the floor. I only glanced at it.

[MAX *is evidently not quite sure how much* GABRIELLE *guesses or whether she has actually read anything from the piece of paper. He controls himself.*]

MAX. I didn't mean to be sharp with you.

GABRIELLE. Oh, it's all right. It doesn't matter how you speak to me.

[MAX *takes up the small sheet of paper which he has just written from the table and slips it into his pocket.*]

MAX. You'd better go back to your own room. It's time you were leaving for the theater.

[*He picks up the loose slips of paper.*]

GABRIELLE. I want to talk to you. I must talk to you.

MAX. [*Going to the fireplace.*] I tell you I have some notes to write. I'll be here when you get home. We can talk then if you want to.

GABRIELLE. [*Slowly.*] No, you won't be here when I get home. You'll—you'll slip away and I'll never see you again. I'll never be sure.

MAX. [*Feeling his way.*] For Heaven's sake, what's got into you? You don't think I've taken up with another woman, do you?

[*He tosses the slips of paper into the fire.*]

GABRIELLE. No, I don't think that.

MAX. Then, what the devil!

GABRIELLE. I want to know why the piece of paper I had in my hand was—was—

MAX. Was what?

GABRIELLE. Written in German?

MAX. [*Bluffing easily and fluently.*] Nonsense! It was written in English. You can't read either English or German, you told me so yourself. If I hadn't burned the confounded things I'd show them to you gladly. Don't be a silly little fool about it.

GABRIELLE. [*Putting her hand on his arm.*] Max, Max! You don't know what it means to me. You can't. For God's sake, be honest with me. Make me believe in you. Make me! I'm afraid.

MAX. [*Partly annoyed and partly frightened.*] How can I if you don't tell me what you are afraid of?

GABRIELLE. I don't know how to tell you. I don't know what to tell you. It's all like a nightmare. I—I want to wake up.

MAX. Something's happened here since I went out. What was it?

GABRIELLE. It's been like—

MAX. [*Taking her by the wrist.*] Has someone beside yourself been in this room?

GABRIELLE. You're hurting me—

MAX. Why don't you answer?

GABRIELLE. Yes, yes, someone else.

MAX. Who?

GABRIELLE. It was Henri Fautrelle. I ran into him at the window when I was going back to my own room. He frightened me.

MAX. So, he's been trying to spy on me, has he? Well, much good it will do him.

GABRIELLE. [*Lying.*] It's the first time he was ever out on the roofs.

MAX. How do you know that?

GABRIELLE. He told me himself it was the first time.

MAX. Then you talked to him, did you?

GABRIELLE. I asked him who he was and what he wanted, of course.

MAX. [*With a slight sneer.*] And I suppose he told you he was an honest man, eh? That he only looked in for a little chat.

[*He goes to the door and shuts it.*]

GABRIELLE. I don't remember what he said. He frightened me, I tell you. That's all. I—I'd rather not try to think about it. Please don't ask me.

MAX. Hush! There's someone on the roofs now.

[*They listen.* GABRIELLE *of course knows that it must be* FAUTRELLE *coming back.*]

GABRIELLE. I—I don't hear anything.

MAX. [*In a whisper.*] Be quiet, I tell you!

[*He blows out the lamps and taking* GABRIELLE *by the wrist drags her to the corner of the room near the larger window but out of sight from the roof. The figure of* FAUTRELLE *appears in the window.*]

FAUTRELLE. Are you there, Mademoiselle?

MAX. [*In a whisper.*] Answer him.

FAUTRELLE. I say, are you there, Mademoiselle Gabrielle?

MAX. Tell him to come in.

GABRIELLE. Yes, yes, I'm here. I want to speak to you.

FAUTRELLE. Well, well, what now? What's the matter?

[*He steps down into the room.* MAX *suddenly flings* GABRIELLE *away from him and throws himself upon* FAUTRELLE. *There is a short struggle. The old man succeeds in drawing a knife from his belt.*]

GABRIELLE. Max, Max, for God's sake, what are you doing!

MAX. [*Shaking* FAUTRELLE *as a terrier would shake a rat.*] Damn you!

[MAX *wrenches the knife from* FAUTRELLE'S *hand and hurls him heavily to the floor.* GABRIELLE *rushes to* MAX *and clutches his arm. They both stand over* FAUTRELLE, *looking down at him.* FAUTRELLE *raises himself on his elbow.*]

FAUTRELLE. [*Gasping.*] You—you devils. Oh, mon Dieu!

[*He collapses in a heap.* GABRIELLE *lets go of* MAX, *and kneels beside* FAUTRELLE *lifting his head.* MAX *stands looking on almost stupidly.*]

GABRIELLE. He—he's dead! You've killed him!

MAX. Nonsense! He's only stunned. It'll teach him a lesson.

[*He tosses* FAUTRELLE'S *knife on the table.*]

GABRIELLE. I tell you, he's dead! [MAX *takes a step toward her.*] No, no! Don't come near me! Keep away from me. You made me call him in here.

MAX. I swear I only meant to knock him down. If he's dead it's his own fault. I've a perfect right to strike a thief that breaks into my rooms.

GABRIELLE. You know he wasn't a thief. You know it as well as I do. You killed him because you were afraid of what he knew about you—yourself.

MAX. Don't be a fool!

GABRIELLE. I've been a fool, yes. The greatest fool in the world. I ought to have guessed long ago. Oh, my God! I can think of a hundred little things you've said and done. I ought to have known. But I was deaf and blind and—and I trusted you.

MAX. And you've got to trust me now. Do you hear? It's all right, I swear it is, if you only keep your head. The man was nothing but a dirty spy.

GABRIELLE. And what are you?

MAX. You don't understand!

GABRIELLE. I—I understand everything. You don't have to lie to me any more.

MAX. Well, then, what if I am a spy? A Prussian, eh? I'm still the man you loved. I'm still the man you gave yourself to.

GABRIELLE. You—you needn't remind me! Mary in Heaven, do you think I can ever wipe it out of my mind? Do you think I can ever be clean again? I'll always have the touch of your hands eating into my flesh like hot irons. I'll always feel your kiss on my lips like vitriol. Oh, I'm ashamed! I'll always be ashamed! I'll never be anything else as long as I live.

MAX. Gabrielle! For God's sake, try to control yourself, try to think. We've been happy together. You've loved me. We can't help this—this other thing. It's war. You don't seem to know what that means.

GABRIELLE. It means my people bleeding to death under the heel of your people. It means starving

children and trampled farms and burned houses. It means the ruin of all the little simple things that thousands and thousands of poor men have spent their lives in making or cherishing. It means that the weak are only being made weaker and more pitiful and the strong are only becoming stronger with the death of everything beautiful and gentle and fine in men's hearts. It means—

MAX. You can call it what you like but it's a man's game. It has to be played.

GABRIELLE. Yes, a man's game! And it was a man's game for you to amuse yourself here with a woman when all the while you were only waiting for a chance to stab her brothers in the back. It helped you to pass the time, didn't it? It kept you from getting too restless, too impatient. You even thought you could trust her to act as your unwitting accomplice. Well, why don't you play the game out to a finish? Why don't you kill me as you killed old Henri, there? I'm twice as dangerous, ten times, a hundred times as dangerous, because you've made me hate you.

MAX. No. You're perfectly safe. The door's unlocked. Go out and fetch the gendarmes if you want to.

GABRIELLE. You were followed when you came back here. There may be men watching the house now.

MAX. Possibly. I may even be arrested tonight without your interference. In case that, you needn't have my death on your conscience. Well, why don't you go? I need a few minutes to myself.

GABRIELLE. To send off your pigeons?

MAX. Exactly, madmoiselle. [GABRIELLE *takes a step toward the table.*] Be good enough to keep away from the table.

GABRIELLE. You think if I try to stop you myself you can easily overpower me? You think if I scream or go for the police that you'll have plenty of time to send off your despatches before they get here?

MAX. Precisely, and it's quite possible I may even manage to escape myself across the roofs.

GABRIELLE. But you'll be known. They'll have your description. You can't get out of Paris.

MAX. No, I won't be able to get out and I'm hardly fool enough to try when I know a dozen safe hiding places.

GABRIELLE. You mean?

MAX. I mean, my dear, that I've done my work. I've waited weeks to get a certain piece of information for our general staff. It's in my pocket now. Only a few lines in cypher but it's enough. [*He opens the door of the cage as if to take out one of the birds.*] I toss my little friend here out of the window and tomorrow Von Moltke will know the five weakest spots in the defense of Paris.

GABRIELLE. Tomorrow, your General Von Moltke will know nothing, nothing at all. Do you hear me? Nothing!

MAX. So, you think you can stop me after all? Well—

GABRIELLE. I don't have to stop you. There's nothing to stop. It's already been done. He did it. The dead man over there did it. You thought you'd saved yourself and your pigeons but you didn't strike soon enough. You didn't kill him in time.

MAX. What do you mean by that?

GABRIELLE. He's been watching you. He wasn't

blind like me. He wasn't a fool. He came in tonight while you were gone.

MAX. Well, go on.

GABRIELLE. He—he took away your own pigeons and left these of his own.

MAX. Do you think I am crazy enough to believe a yarn like that?

GABRIELLE. If you don't believe me, go and look in his room. You'll find them with their necks twisted. Well, you hear me, don't you?

MAX. It's a lie! You're only playing for time. I know what you're trying to do.

GABRIELLE. That isn't even your own cage on the table. He was coming back to change it when you killed him. Well, why don't you look at it? There's surely some mark you can tell it by.

[MAX *snatches up the cage, looks closely at the pigeons through the bars and sets it down again.*]

Well, why don't you say something?

MAX. Damn you, I'll make you suffer for this. I may be a spy but, by God, I'm less contemptible than a creature like you. A thing out of the gutter that gives her kisses to a man she's all the time planning to betray.

GABRIELLE. I'm not afraid of you. There's nothing you can do to me now—nothing that makes any difference.

MAX. [*Grimly.*] We'll see about that.

[*He goes to the door locks it and puts the key in his pocket then he turns and faces* GABRIELLE.]

GABRIELLE. [*Facing him.*] Well, why don't you strike me with your fists? Why don't you kill me?

MAX. Because that would be too kind. When I'm through with you, you're welcome to kill yourself if you want to. That's your own affair.

GABRIELLE. You—you coward! [*She makes a move toward the door.*]

MAX. That's it! Beat on the door. There's nobody in the house but Pere Rigaud on the first floor. He's probably half drunk by this time. He'll take good care not to hear you anyway.

[GABRIELLE *moves toward the smaller window.*] Yes, try the window if you like. Damn you! Before you can lift the sash, I'll smother your screaming with a thousand kisses. Prussian kisses, eh? The kind you'll never forget as long as you live, eh? The kind that burn you like vitriol, eh? Well, well, what about it? You hate me do you? And you're not afraid of me? There's nothing I can do that will make any difference? Perhaps you'll have changed your mind when they find you tomorrow morning.

GABRIELLE. You—you beast—

MAX. They'll find you bound and gagged on the floor beside that heap of carrion, there.

GABRIELLE. You fiend!

MAX. Yes, coward, beast, fiend, anything you want to call me, I'll be all that and more!

[*He attempts to seize* GABRIELLE. *She runs to the door and beats on it with her fists.* MAX *follows and catches her in his arms. She breaks away from him, runs to the center table and snatches up* FAUTRELLE'S *knife.* MAX *flings himself upon her and she stabs him.* MAX *gives a choking sound, staggers a few steps and falls, dragging the cover from the*

table as he goes down. GABRIELLE *stands looking at him, horror struck, and the knife slips from her hands. She kneels beside* MAX *but cannot bring herself to touch him.*]

GABRIELLE. Max! Max! do you hear me?

[*There's no answer.* GABRIELLE *rises and looks about the room in terror. There is a knock at the door.* GABRIELLE *shrinks away from the sound.*]

THE CONCIERGE. [*Speaking outside.*] M'sieu' Max! I say, M'sieu' Max—[*There is a pause.*] There's a squad of soldiers in the street. They're knocking at the door.

[GABRIELLE *listens for a moment longer, then goes swiftly to the mantel, takes the two lighted candlesticks and places one at* MAX'S *head and the other at his feet, then she fumbles in the pocket of his coat, takes out the despatch and thrusts it in the bosom of her dress. Before she rises, she leans over and looks at his face, touches his lips with the tips of her fingers and gives a little sob. The sound of voices on the stairs becomes audible.* GABRIELLE *rises and goes slowly toward the large window.*]

CURTAIN

STAGE GUILD PLAYS

BEHIND THE BLACK CLOTH

A Melodrama in One Act

BEHIND THE BLACK CLOTH was produced in February, 1923, by the Guild Players of Pittsburgh, under the direction of Theodore Viehman, with the following cast:

CHARACTERS

DOCTOR ALESSANDRO BLAKELOCK . . Theodore Viehman
MARTIN STACEY . . . . . Phillip R. Thorn
NAGEL PARENT, A Police Reporter . . . John A. Willard
VERA POPE, Blakelock's Secretary . . . . . Sara Floyd

BEHIND THE BLACK CLOTH

The Place is a room in DOCTOR BLAKELOCK'S *private Sanatorium on the Connecticut shore of Long Island Sound. It is a pleasantly furnished place, evidently used as a combination lounge and work room by the* DOCTOR *himself. At the back are large French windows and to the left of them a door opening into* BLAKELOCK'S *laboratory. In the right wall near the back is a doorway opening into the hall. There is also a smaller door in the right wall nearer the audience. There is a large table in the center of the room with books and magazines. At the left near the front is a typewriter table, at which* VERA POPE *is typing busily. Her hat and jacket are lying on a chair near her. The room is filled with a flood of May morning sunshine from the French windows. As the curtain rises* MARTIN STACEY *is leaning against the center table filling a briar pipe.*

MARTIN. The last one's to go special delivery.

VERA. "J. C. Connolly, 87 Broad."

MARTIN. Right. [NAGEL PARENT *enters by the door at the right.*]

NAGEL. It's the papers and mail, Mr. Stacey.

[*At the sound of* NAGEL'S *voice,* VERA'S *attention is suddenly arrested. She does not turn her head, however.*]

MARTIN. Give them here.

[NAGEL *advances and holds out the tray of letters.* MARTIN *looks at him closely.*]

So, you're the new butler, eh? Haven't I seen you somewhere before?

NAGEL. Possibly, sir. I couldn't say. My name's Watson. I'm Bolt's nephew, sir, taking his place temporary while he's on his vacation.

MARTIN. Why did Bolt need a vacation?

NAGEL. I couldn't say, sir, unless it was the strain of the inquest and the testifying.

MARTIN. Hmm! Where's Doctor Blakelock?

NAGEL. On the lawn in front of the house, sir.

MARTIN. I'll take these to him myself. Put the papers on Miss Pope's desk.

NAGEL. Very good, sir.

VERA. I'll put the Connolly letter on the table for you to sign.

MARTIN. Good. [*He goes to the hall door counting the letters in his hand.*] Two, four, six— [*He goes out, the others remain motionless and silent until he is out of earshot.*]

NAGEL. Well, Vera?

VERA. Then, it is you, Nagel Parent!

NAGEL. Yes.

VERA. When were you assigned to cover this case?

NAGEL. I'd like to ask you the same question.

VERA. I'm not covering it.

NAGEL. Police work on the side?

VERA. No.

NAGEL. You've got me, then.

VERA. I've quit newspaper work. I'm helping Doctor Blakelock on a book. I'm his secretary. I've got to make a living.

NAGEL. Not if you care to take up a little proposition I made you.

VERA. Did you come here on my account.

NAGEL. Partly. I had other reasons.

VERA. You've no business to ferret out what I do with my time.

NAGEL. You've been here in this house during the whole infernal business.

VERA. What of it? There's been nothing crooked done here.

NAGEL. Do you think for a minute that people of average intelligence like the boss of my paper are satisfied with this verdict of natural death?

VERA. Why not? The experts who performed the autopsy were satisfied.

NAGEL. Rats! A man like Morhead Thornton can't die in a private sanatorium run by a discredited hypnotic quack like Blakelock and leave his entire property of

several hundred thousands equally divided between the keeper of the joint and a valet that's been with him less than a month, without raising a big howl that's got to be answered.

VERA. It was answered at the inquest.

NAGEL. That don't go down with my boss and it don't go down with me. I don't say I'd have begged this job if you hadn't been mixed up in it, but I'm here to take a good squint at the old Doc and Mr. Martin Stacey, and I mean to stick.

VERA. Well, you can go back and tell your editor there's no story. Morhead Thornton wasn't murdered; that's all there is to it. Who'd be fool enough to kill a man that was practically dead when he came here?

NAGEL. That's what I'm here to find out. If there hasn't been a murder, there's been something else.

VERA. Mr. Thornton's own lawyer, Mr. Connolly, drafted the will. He came here to do it. Dr. Blakelock and Martin Stacey weren't even in the house. I took the dictation myself and Bolt and I signed as witnesses. Mr. Connolly argued against Mr. Thornton's leaving his money as he did.

NAGEL. I know a little bit about this sort of game. There's such a thing as post-hypnotic suggestion.

VERA. It wasn't that, I tell you. I'm satisfied, quite satisfied in my own mind.

NAGEL. You speak as if your being satisfied was all that ought to be required.

VERA. It is all that ought to be required.

NAGEL. Why?

VERA. Because Morhead Thornton was my own father.

NAGEL. [*Taken aback.*] Good God! You old Thornton's daughter! I never knew that. I never dreamed—

VERA. Neither did he—

NAGEL. You mean?

VERA. No, no! Not what you mean. My mother was married to him. She was an actress, Violet Wells—a chorus girl. He may have married her when he was drunk, I don't know. It isn't a pretty story. Any way, I've got the certificate. It's all she left me except the hatred of my father. He never lived with her. He bought her off with money. She never made any more claim on him after she spent it; never told me he was my father till the day she died. That's how she felt about him.

NAGEL. But the people you lived with, don't they know? Your aunt, Mrs. Pope, how about her?

VERA. She's no relative. My mother boarded with her—she took me when my mother died. That's why I use her name. She doesn't know anything about it.

NAGEL. Do Blakelock and Stacey know?

VERA. Not yet.

NAGEL. Are you going to put in a claim?

VERA. I—I haven't decided.

NAGEL. You're pretty late in the day. You'll have some awkward explaining to do.

VERA. Not so awkward as you'll have when I tell Dr. Blakelock that you're a reporter.

NAGEL. Two can play that.

VERA. Dr. Blakelock has been kind to me. I won't have him spied on.

NAGEL. Tell me what your own game is.

VERA. I'll tell you everything if you'll only promise to go.

NAGEL. The condition's too steep.

VERA. Then if you're not gone by the last train tonight, I'll have you thrown out.

NAGEL. I'll take my chance.
[*There is a sound of a door closing.*]

VERA. It's the hall door. They're coming back.
[NAGEL *gathers up a vase of flowers from the table and goes toward the door with it.* MARTIN *enters followed by* BLAKELOCK.]

BLAKELOCK. Well, Miss Pope, we're a little late starting work today.

MARTIN. I'll clear out as soon as we sign a letter to Connolly.
[*He goes to the table.*]

VERA. I'm sorry—I forgot. Here it is.
[*She hands a letter to* MARTIN *and he glances through it. He sits down at the center table and signs the letter.*]

BLAKELOCK. [*To* VERA.] Headache?

VERA. I feel a little faint. I'll be all right presently.
[MARTIN *looks up.*]

BLAKELOCK. [*Glancing at his watch.*] Go out and

walk up and down in the fresh air. The work can wait. We musn't have you giving out.

VERA. Thanks.

BLAKELOCK. [*To* MARTIN.] I'll be in the laboratory, if you want me, Stacey. You needn't go until Miss Pope gets back.

MARTIN. All right, Doctor.

[BLAKELOCK *goes into the laboratory and closes the door after him.* VERA *picks up her hat and begins pinning it on.*]

MARTIN. Just a minute, Miss Pope.

VERA. Yes?

MARTIN. I can't get it out of my head that I've seen this man Watson somewhere.

VERA. I—I—really, my head seems to be splitting, Mr. Stacey.

MARTIN. Hmm! Never mind. [*He closes and seals the letter.*]

VERA. Was there anything else?

MARTIN. Yes. [*He rises.*] Forgive my bothering you, but are you really sick, I mean sicker than you let on to be? This has been a rotten time for you. You've been a brick to stay on here through all this row.

VERA. I don't see why I should give up a good position because of the publicity Dr. Blakelock had forced on him.

MARTIN. Of course, that's the right way to look at it. But didn't you ever have any doubts about Blakelock and me? Answer me honestly.

VERA. Yes. I had—at first.

MARTIN. Have you still got them?

VERA. No.

MARTIN. See here, Miss Pope, what do you intend to do when Blakelock finishes this book? Got any family to look after you if you're not up to snuff?

VERA. No. I'm—I'm quite on my own.

MARTIN. You're not over good at your line of work, I've noticed that. You won't find it easy to keep going.

VERA. Thanks, awfully!

MARTIN. Don't take it the wrong way. I'm only getting round to ask you to marry me.

VERA. Marry you?

MARTIN. I put it pretty bluntly. I'm sorry. But I have to take my chance. I'm planning to go away this week—to the Argentine. I've got plenty of money now, only I'll never get a right start in this country, I can see that. But I won't go without you. I can't.

VERA. Suppose, I did say I'd go with you, would they, I mean the authorities, let you go?

MARTIN. There's no criminal charge against me.

VERA. But if someone contested Mr. Thornton's will?

MARTIN. [*Uneasily.*] Connolly's looked into it. Mr. Thornton hadn't any relatives that we know of.

VERA. But if someone did put in a claim, and prove it?

MARTIN. I'd do the fair thing if it would put me in any better light with you.

VERA. That's all I want to know.

MARTIN. You're not going to chuck the whole thing up?

VERA. Let me think. My head's splitting. I must get out of doors. I must walk.

MARTIN. I'm sorry.

[*He goes to the hall door and holds it open for her.* VERA *goes to the door, pauses and holds out her hand to* MARTIN.]

VERA. Thank you for wanting me. I—I think I can give you an answer tonight.

MARTIN. It'll mean a lot to me if you can.

[VERA *goes out.* MARTIN *closes the door after her, comes back to the table, picks up a book, looks at it absently, hesitates and then goes to the laboratory door and opens it.*]

MARTIN. Come out here, Blakelock, I want to talk to you. I don't want to be left alone.

BLAKELOCK. Why don't you come in here, then?

MARTIN. You know damned well I never go into your laboratory.

BLAKELOCK. [*Coming to the door.*] What's the matter with it?

MARTIN. It's too much like a vault in a cemetery; not the tidy little kind where you sleep quietly, but the

big receiving vault where everybody shifts and changes.

BLAKELOCK. Nerves! You ought to be beyond that by this time, Thornton.

MARTIN. Don't call me that. You know what my name is—now.

BLAKELOCK. Very well, Mr. Martin Stacey.

MARTIN. I'm almost used to that. But, by God, I'll tell you one thing, Blakelock, I'm going to change it—as soon as I dare. It makes me feel like a thief.

BLAKELOCK. Almost everyone who gets what he wants steals from somebody. A naked man steals a suit of clothes without compunction. In the science I follow we get past flinching at the word theft.

MARTIN. Have you a science? Sometimes I think you've only driven me mad, that I'll wake up just as I was. Sometimes I think you're the Devil himself.

BLAKELOCK. You didn't use to believe in the Devil and a future state, my friend.

MARTIN. One thing you've put into me anyway; that's a belief in the lastingness of my own soul. . . . . You've put fear into me.

BLAKELOCK. Fear of what?

MARTIN. The last reckoning. The time when I have to stand really naked . . .

BLAKELOCK. Nonsense! Soul—spirit—intelligence —what is it? I don't pretend to know. I'm like an electrician that spends his life harnessing power, pouring it from one container into another, and can't tell you what it really is, where it comes from, or what becomes

of it. Look at it another way. Man's an internal combustion engine. He's driven by naphtha—ether—alcohol—some sort of fuel—that's the spirit, the intelligence. The engine may give out and break down from wear or abuse and still have enough fuel left to drive another more perfect motor for a long time. What have we done about it up to now? Nothing. We've let the naphtha drip away through the leaky valves—evaporate—go back into the ground, the air—instead of catching it in a bowl and feeding it to the other motor. And all because we've been afraid to apply science to something that the ignorant have labeled Supernatural, Sacred, Holy.

MARTIN. But when the other engine already has its own fuel?

BLAKELOCK. If it's inferior in quality, throw it away—a small waste to save a greater. That's an economical principle.

MARTIN. Is that all you see in what you've done?

BLAKELOCK. I see something accomplished that not one scientist in a million would dream possible.

MARTIN. And four hundred thousand dollars in your own pocket.

BLAKELOCK. You said to me once: "Blakelock, I'd give half of everything I have," half—note the cautious reservation—"if I could live the last forty years of my life over again." It's too late to go back on your bargain. Perhaps you regret it, eh?

MARTIN. [*Almost fiercely.*] Perhaps. I don't know. Did you ever think I might come to have a terrible horror and hatred of you? That I mightn't let you do for anybody else what you've done for me?

BLAKELOCK. Tush, my dear fellow! Only this morning you called me your benefactor.

MARTIN. So was the man who made Frankenstein his benefactor, in a way.

BLAKELOCK. Come now, this won't do. [*Taking* MARTIN'S *wrist.*] Excitement. Altogether too fast. Sit down. We aren't entirely out of danger yet.

MARTIN. There's something you've left out of account: the personality, the self, the individual consciousness, the thing that goes on and on. What controls it? What am I? Who am I? What determines identity, the needs of the body or the needs of the spirit?

BLAKELOCK. I don't know. I can't tell you,—at least not now. Perhaps after a while when you've gotten shaken together—when I've had you under observation for a month or two longer.

MARTIN. No, no! By God, not that! If you can't tell me now, you'll never be able to tell me.

BLAKELOCK. What do you mean by that?

MARTIN. I'm going away, out of your reach. You'll never see me again,—never come near me again. I'm going tomorrow, at once, as soon as I can wire Connolly for money.

BLAKELOCK. Don't raise your voice so. Stop it, I tell you.

MARTIN. I won't have you putting your hands on me. I won't have you asking me questions. I can't breathe in this house. I can't get the sight of that coffin out of my eyes.

[*He evidently struggles for further speech.*

[BLAKELOCK *puts his hand on* MARTIN'S *arm trying to calm him.* NAGEL *enters with a fresh vase of flowers and halts suddenly beside the door. He of course overhears the following speech.*]

BLAKELOCK. Be still! Be still, can't you? I tell you be still, man.

MARTIN. I swear when I looked into that coffin it was like looking into a horrible mirror.

[BLAKELOCK *at last makes him aware that there is someone else in the room. He looks up and sees* NAGEL. *He rises and goes toward him.*]

MARTIN. [*To* NAGEL.] What are you doing here?

NAGEL. I've brought another vase of flowers, sir.

MARTIN. Step over here and let me look at you again.

BLAKELOCK. [*To* MARTIN.] Come, come, Stacey, this won't do.

[VERA *enters by the door back right.* STACEY *has advanced almost to where* NAGEL *stands their eyes meet for a moment. Then* STACEY *becomes aware of* VERA'S *presence, turns abruptly away from* NAGEL, *picks up his hat from a chair and goes out, passing* VERA *in the doorway.*]

BLAKELOCK. [*To* NAGEL.] You musn't mind Mr. Stacey. He's a little upset this morning.

[*He touches his own forehead.*]

NAGEL. I don't mind in the least, sir.

[*He advances to the table and sets down the vase.*

VERA *has been looking after* MARTIN *curiously, her back turned toward the others while she takes the pins out of her hat. She puts the hat down and turns to* BLAKELOCK.]

VERA. The headache is gone, Dr. Blakelock. I'm ready to begin.

BLAKELOCK. Good. I'll fetch my papers from the laboratory. We'll work in here today. The air's better.

VERA. Thanks. [BLAKELOCK *goes into laboratory.*] Well, have you made up your mind to go?

NAGEL. No, I'll stay, at least till the last train tonight. I've had a look at something.

VERA. What?

NAGEL. I've had a look into Martin Stacey's eyes.

VERA. What do you mean?

NAGEL. There was something there. It was like looking against a piece of black cloth.

[BLAKELOCK *enters with a sheaf of manuscript in his hand.*]

BLAKELOCK. Well, here we are. Caption to Chapter Seventeen....

[VERA *turns slowly from* NAGEL *and seats herself at the typewriter desk.* NAGEL *goes toward the hall door.*]

[*The Curtain falls for a moment. When it rises again, about eleven hours are supposed to have elapsed. The room is lighted by a large lamp on the center table and by a smaller one on the typewriter desk.* VERA *is at work typing from a book of short-hand*

notes. BLAKELOCK *enters from the hall, goes to the table and picks up a pair of field glasses.*]

BLAKELOCK. There's a storm coming. You'd better be getting back to the Inn.

VERA. I brought a waterproof and an umbrella when I came back from supper.

BLAKELOCK. If you don't mind lightning, you ought to come out on the other side of the house. I've been sitting there for an hour with Stacey, watching the clouds come over the Sound.

VERA. I must finish these sheets. I'm leaving tomorrow.

BLAKELOCK. Eh? How's that?

VERA. Dr. Blakelock, I'm going to be married.

BLAKELOCK. Bless my soul! Isn't this very sudden? You can surely manage to stay on a few days till I get somebody else?

VERA. I hate to leave you in the lurch, but I've got to go back to New York. We're leaving for the Argentine. The steamer sails Thursday, I think.

BLAKELOCK. We?

VERA. Mr. Stacey and I. He asked me to marry him this morning.

BLAKELOCK. Hmm! I'd think it over a little longer if I were you.

VERA. Is there any reason why I shouldn't marry Mr. Stacey?

BLAKELOCK. No, absolutely none. I suppose I'm

at liberty to congratulate him?

VERA. No, please. I haven't given him my answer yet.

BLAKELOCK. You're an odd girl. I can't make you out.

VERA. If you're going back to Mr. Stacey, will you ask him to come here in ten minutes.

BLAKELOCK. In ten minutes?

VERA. Not any sooner, please. Give me your word.

BLAKELOCK. Of course, if you like. In ten minutes, then.

[BLAKELOCK *goes out through the hall door and closes it.* VERA *goes over and presses the bell. In a few moments* NAGEL *enters by the small door at the right.*]

NAGEL. Who rang for me?

VERA. I did.

NAGEL. Well?

VERA. I want you to go up to your room and pack your bag. Tell the housekeeper you're leaving by the last train: the 10:42. If you don't, I'll—

NAGEL. You needn't make any threats. I've already telephoned for a hack. I'm going back to New York tonight, and what's more, you're going with me.

VERA. See here, Nagel Parent, I've stood enough from you already.

NAGEL. I'm not trying to force myself on you. I

won't even speak to you on the train if you like. I'm willing to promise anything. Only, I've got to get you out of this house. There's nothing else possible.

VERA. Tell me what you think you've found out.

NAGEL. I've found out that Morhead Thornton wasn't murdered. I've found out that he wasn't influenced in making his will by Dr. Blakelock or Martin Stacey. I know that no one in this house has taken a penny that doesn't rightfully belong to him.

VERA. I told you there had been nothing wrong here. Maybe you believe me now.

NAGEL. No.

VERA. This is intolerable. What do you mean?

NAGEL. I told you when I looked into Martin Stacey's eyes, it was like looking against a piece of black cloth. Well, I've looked behind it and I know what's there.

VERA. Then perhaps you'll tell me what you saw.

NAGEL. If I did you wouldn't believe me.

VERA. Will you stop talking in riddles and tell me flat out what you're driving at?

NAGEL. I'll tell you five things I've seen and heard in this house.

VERA. Well, be quick about it.

NAGEL. Stacey's had every mirror covered with paper except the one in the coat room. He's been at great pains to look up his own history before he came to Mr. Thornton, just as if he'd lost his memory. Third: I found a note book with some memoranda

dated last year and signed Martin Stacey. It wasn't the same handwriting I saw on the letter to Connolly this morning. Fourth: the housekeeper told me he almost refused to look into Thornton's coffin at the funeral; and I overheard him say to Blakelock that when he did look into it, it was like looking into a horrible mirror.

VERA. Well, is that all?

NAGEL. It ought to be enough if you look at it squarely to show you that there's been a—crime, an unbelievable crime.

VERA. Then, why don't you go to the police?

NAGEL. The crime I'm thinking of couldn't be proved in a court of law.

VERA. No, nor anywhere else. You're crazy, that's what's the matter with you. I've got no more patience. What you've said means nothing at all. Nothing.

NAGEL. If you know what's good for Vera Pope, you'll get out of this house with me as quick as you can.

VERA. That's enough. If you don't go now, right away, I'll call Mr. Stacey and have you kicked out.

NAGEL. When I get through with Mr. Stacey, he'll urge you to do exactly what I ask you to.

VERA. Perhaps you'd like to know that I'm going to marry Mr. Stacey.

NAGEL. Yes, I thought from the first you had that in mind.

VERA. Perhaps you think you can stop it?

NAGEL. I can stop it. I will stop it.

VERA. What right have you to talk to me like this?

NAGEL. The right of one human being to protect another.

[*The hall door opens and* BLAKELOCK *enters followed by* STACEY.]

BLAKELOCK. The ten minutes are up, Miss Pope. I'm going into the laboratory. The door's thick, you can talk as loud as you like.

[*He goes.*]

MARTIN. [*To* VERA.] You sent for me. You've got an answer for me.

VERA. Yes, yes! But there's something else first.

MARTIN. [*Turning and seeing* NAGEL.] Well, Watson, what's the matter? What are you waiting for?

NAGEL. Miss Pope has something she wants to tell you about me.

VERA. His name isn't Watson. He's Nagel Parent, a police reporter on the Daily Courier.

MARTIN. So that's it, is it? Look here, young man, I knew there was something crooked about you. I suppose you know I'd have a perfect right to kick you out of this house as I'd kick a cur.

NAGEL. I'm not in the least afraid of your trying.

MARTIN. No, you needn't be. Kindly take my compliments to your editor, and tell him Dr. Blakelock and I will be glad to talk to any of his staff, at any time, when they come to us like gentlemen. Good night, Mr. Parent. You know your way to the door.

[*They stand facing each other.*]

NAGEL. I'm not going unless this young lady goes with me.

MARTIN. You're not, eh?

NAGEL. Unless you've lost the last sense of decency, you'll tell her to do as I say.

MARTIN. So you think you've got something on me, do you? You think you've got the whip hand of me?

NAGEL. I mean exactly that.

MARTIN. I'll call your bluff then. What do you think you've found out?

NAGEL. Send Miss Pope out of the room and I'll tell you.

MARTIN. Miss Pope's going to marry me. There's nothing you can say about me that she isn't privileged to hear.

NAGEL. Vera, I beg you. There's no need you should hear what I have to say.

VERA. There's every need I should hear it.

MARTIN. Go on, sir, and be quick about it.

NAGEL. Have it your own way, then. I accuse you you and Blakelock of murder.

MARTIN. This is ridiculous.

NAGEL. I accuse you of the murder of—of Martin Stacey. I accuse you of the theft of his living and breathing body. I—

VERA. He's gone mad. Let me call Dr. Blakelock.

MARTIN. [*To* VERA.] No. We can deal with this

ourselves. [*To* NAGEL.] Look at me, Mr. Parent. You said Martin Stacey had been murdered. If I'm not Martin Stacey, who am I?

NAGEL. I don't need to tell you who or what you are, and I'd rather not—tell Miss Pope.

VERA. Wait.

NAGEL. For God's sake, haven't I said enough? Tell her to go.

MARTIN. [*Controlling himself with an effort.*] You've said a damned sight too much. You've made an accusation that you can't back up with a word of sense. It doesn't even call for an answer. You're a lunatic, damn you—or worse. I can't get at your motive. I don't want to get at it.

VERA. Wait. I think I can tell you. Mr. Parent knew me before I came to Dr. Blakelock. He came here partly on my account. He wanted to marry me.

MARTIN. So that's it, is it? You're just a low, jealous, sneaking cur, are you?

NAGEL. You can call me what you like. That's got nothing to do with it.

MARTIN. There's a loaded revolver in the drawer of that table. If you don't get out of here, I'll put you out if I have to shoot you. Do you understand me?

NAGEL. [*Disregarding* MARTIN *and speaking to* VERA. *He takes out his watch as he does so.*] I'm going up to my room for my suitcase. The hack ought to be here by this time. [*To* MARTIN.] There's one thing Miss Pope hasn't found time to tell you. If that doesn't alter your attitude, I'll—I'll own myself beaten.

MARTIN. Well?

NAGEL. Miss Pope is the daughter of Morhead Thornton by his marriage to Violet Wells, an actress, twenty-seven years ago.

[MARTIN *steadies himself against the table.* NAGEL *looks at him closely as if to note the effect of his words, then goes to the hall door and turns.*]

NAGEL. [*To* MARTIN.] I'll leave you to think that over.

VERA. What does he mean?

MARTIN. [*A change has come over him. He seems to be suddenly older and weaker. He speaks almost plaintively.*] I suppose that was a lie, every word of it a lie?

VERA. You mean about me?

MARTIN. Yes.

VERA. No, the part about me is true.

MARTIN. [*His hand to his throat.*] You're—you're not Thornton's daughter? You can't be. I'd have known it.

VERA. Nobody knows it but Nagel Parent. What does it matter who I am? Martin—Martin, what's the matter with you? I only wanted to wait and tell you after we were married.

MARTIN. Good God! Afterward! Does Blakelock know who you are? If—if he does—

VERA. No, no. He doesn't. Why should he?

MARTIN. Why did you come here? What's been your game? Don't lie to me. Why didn't you tell

Thornton you were his daughter? Why haven't you put in a claim on his estate.

VERA. Must I tell you now?

MARTIN. You've got to tell me everything—now—right away before Parent comes back.

VERA. I—I wouldn't make any claim on Mr. Thornton because—I—I wasn't proud to think he was my father. Beside there'd been a sort of settlement with my mother when he divorced her. I don't think he ever knew I'd been born. But I used to hear about him, and read about him and wonder how I could have any decent instincts with his blood in me. It got to be a sort of obsession with me. I followed everything he did. I was doing newspaper work. I caught the Broadway gossip—all about his scandals and dissipations and meanness. After awhile I heard that his health had given out,—that he'd gone from one doctor to another—that they'd all told him he couldn't live. Finally I heard he was being treated by Dr. Blakelock. I looked up Dr. Blakelock and found out who he was. It was morbid, terrible, but I wanted to see my father suffer. I wanted to come here. Then I stumbled on an advertisement in the paper. I knew it was Blakelock's by the address. He wanted a young woman stenographer. I gave up my job on the paper and applied for the place. I got it.

MARTIN. You didn't intend to tell Thornton who you were?

VERA. I couldn't make up my mind at first. I—I only wanted to see him suffer the way he'd made my mother suffer. I wanted to see how a man that had lived as he had would face death.

MARTIN. God, how you must have hated him!

VERA. I hated him more and more because he never showed the least sign of fear. It—it didn't seem natural. It made him seem more of a beast.

MARTIN. Didn't you have any pity for him?

VERA. No.

MARTIN. Suppose I told you that he was afraid, horribly afraid, to die?

VERA. It wouldn't make any difference.

MARTIN. But the money?

VERA. Can't you understand? I couldn't touch the money coming directly from him.

MARTIN. You didn't want the money, eh?

VERA. Yes, I wanted it. I wasn't above wanting it. Oh, it all sounds so sordid and nasty. Why do you make me tell you?

MARTIN. How do you mean—sordid and nasty?

VERA. I thought at first you and Blakelock were only trying to get my father's money. Then, when I got to know you better, I changed my mind. It didn't matter much anyway. Afterward, when I had seen my father's will, when I knew you were to get half of his estate, I got to thinking about you more and more. I wanted you to have it and I wanted it myself. It seemed as if—as if—oh, that if I could only fall in love with you and you with me, it would all be so simple.

MARTIN. So that's why! You knew I was in love with you. It—it—

VERA. I tell you I wouldn't have sold myself. I wouldn't be telling you all this if—if I didn't love you. I do love you. Why does it matter how I came to think of you first, so long as I love you now?

MARTIN. It doesn't matter. Nothing matters. Nothing at all.

VERA. Is there anything else you want me to tell you?

MARTIN. Where did you put your hat and wrap? Where are they?

VERA. In the hall. Why?

MARTIN. Get them. Put them on.

VERA. Why?

MARTIN. You're going with Mr. Parent. You're going back to New York now, tonight.

VERA. Martin! Martin, don't take it like this!

MARTIN. You'd better take Mr. Parent's advice. You'll be safe with him.

VERA. What's the matter with you? Are you sick? I don't understand what you mean.

MARTIN. Don't come near me. Don't touch me, I tell you. Keep away from me.

VERA. You're not crazy enough to think I'd care what Nagel Parent said,—that isn't it?

MARTIN. No. Parent's a fool. Nobody'd believe him. But—I've—I've changed my mind. I can't marry you.

VERA. Look at me! Why can't you marry me? What's made you change like this? It isn't because of what Nagel Parent said,—that's too ridiculous. It isn't because I hated my father or because I wanted the money. You said yourself that didn't matter to you. What is it? You've got to tell me. Why don't you answer me?

MARTIN. I can't give you any explanation.

VERA. Don't you love me?

MARTIN. [*In agony.*] Oh, God, why did you ask me that?

VERA. Because if you do love me, there's only one reason that could make you throw me over like this.

MARTIN. I—I don't love you. I never loved you.

VERA. That's a lie, Martin Stacey.

MARTIN. Well, what if it is!

VERA. It means that you lied to me before. It means that you did murder my father.

MARTIN. I swear you're mistaken.

VERA. Then, why shouldn't you marry me?

MARTIN. I won't, I tell you. I can't.

VERA. [*Forcing him relentlessly.*] Then you are a murderer and a thief.

MARTIN. It's a lie. It's all lies. I swear if you'll go, I'll give you all my share of the money. I'll see that Blakelock comes across with half of his—

VERA. [*Watching him closely.*] Do you realize that if I went to the District Attorney, he'd reopen the case?

It would be enough to convict you, your having offered to bribe me.

MARTIN. You couldn't do that.

VERA. No matter how much I hated my father, no matter how much I loved you, the minute I'm convinced you had a hand in helping to kill him, I'll see that you take the consequences.

MARTIN. It's all a mistake.

VERA. Then, I want the only sure proof of your innocence.

MARTIN. I tell you I can't marry you. Child, child, I'll give you any other proof.

VERA. There isn't any other.

MARTIN. I must think this over. We must both think it over till morning.

VERA. [*Still forcing him.*] No. I've given you your choice. You've got to settle it tonight, now, before Mr. Parent comes back.

MARTIN. I warn you, Vera, you don't know what you're doing.

VERA. I know what I'll do if you don't take back—what you've said tonight.

MARTIN. Would you believe me if I did?

VERA. Yes.

MARTIN. You're a strange girl. I can't make you out. There's no changing you?

VERA. No.

[MARTIN *takes her by the shoulders and looks into her eyes. She returns his gaze steadily.*]

MARTIN. Very well, then. I'd have saved you this if I could. [*He drops his arms at his side.*] I must speak to Blakelock.

VERA. Why?

MARTIN. [*Now speaking quite calmly.*] You'll know presently.

[*He goes to the table.*]

MARTIN. Where's a pencil and paper?

VERA. Under the lamp.

[*She speaks with her back toward the table.*]

MARTIN. [*Watching* VERA *closely.*] Thanks.

[*He opens the table drawer swiftly and takes out the revolver which he slips into his coat pocket. Then he takes a pencil, scribbles a few lines on a piece of paper, folds it, rises and comes round the table again to where* VERA *is standing. There is a sudden crash of thunder and a gust of wind and rain against the window.*]

MARTIN. [*Holding out the paper to* VERA.] Here, take this note.

VERA. [*Shrinking before* MARTIN'S *look.*] What am I to do with it?

MARTIN. Give it to Parent when he comes for you.

[*He turns and goes unsteadily to the laboratory door, opens it, passes through and closes it after him.* VERA *makes a move to follow him, then hesitates, turns and runs toward the hall door. Just as she reaches it, it opens, and*

NAGEL *enters, dressed in a suit of grey tweeds and carrying his rain coat and hat.*]

NAGEL. [*Looking around for* MARTIN.] Well, what's happened?

VERA. [*Trying to pull herself together.*] I—I don't know.

NAGEL. What's that you've got in your hand?

VERA. A note Mr. Stacey asked me to give you.

[NAGEL *takes the note, reads it hastily and crumples it in his hand.*]

NAGEL. Where is he now?

VERA. [*Pointing to the laboratory door.*] In there with Dr. Blakelock. [NAGEL *sees the open tabledrawer steps over quickly and looks into it.*]

NAGEL. He's taken the revolver.

VERA. You don't think—it can't be that—he wouldn't do that—

[*She makes a move toward the laboratory door.* NAGEL *seizes her wrist.*]

NAGEL. Wait!

VERA. [*Struggling.*] Let me go! Let me go!

NAGEL. Listen, I tell you.

[*There is a sound of a chair crashing over. Blakelock's voice is heard faintly through the closed door.*]

BLAKELOCK. Put that away, man! You'll hurt somebody.

VERA. [*Screaming.*] Let me go, Nagel Parent! Let me go!

NAGEL. You can't do any good. Don't be a fool, Vera.

[*There is a sound of a revolver shot.* NAGEL *drops* VERA'S *wrist and runs to the laboratory door. Before he reaches it there is another shot.* VERA *shrinks back against the wall.* NAGEL *throws open the laboratory door looks in and starts back.*]

VERA. Why—don't you say something? Why don't you tell me?

NAGEL. Both of them—

VERA. What does it mean? I seem to be going crazy! What does it mean?

NAGEL. [*Coming over to her.*] Read this.

[*He hands her the crumpled piece of paper.* VERA *reads it in a dazed way.*]

VERA. No, no, not that. Not what you said—it's terrible, it's monstrous.

NAGEL. You won't believe me even now?

[*There is another terrible peal of thunder. The window is burst open by a blast of wind and rain. The lamp is blown out leaving the room dark except for the glow from the laboratory door.*]

VERA. [*Screaming and clinging to* NAGEL.] It was in my father's handwriting. Take me away, take me away from here! Take me away!

CURTAIN

STAGE GUILD PLAYS

AT THE EDGE OF THE WOOD

AT THE EDGE OF THE WOOD was originally produced by "The Friends of Our Native Landscape" in 1918, and has been repeated annually by the same organization.

CHARACTERS

A FAUN
A WOOD SPRITE
A POET
AN ARTIST
AN ARCHITECT
A MERCHANT
A WORKING MAN
A WORKING WOMAN

AT THE EDGE OF THE WOOD

The Place is an open space at the edge of an old wood. There are high, spreading trees and behind them a tangle of undergrowth. A path runs near the trees and at the left near the audience is an unlighted camp fire. When the audience is seated, THE POET *enters from the right, followed by* THE MERCHANT, THE ARCHITECT *and the* ARTIST. *Each carries a fagot of wood. They advance to the to the center of the clear space and* THE POET *speaks as if addressing his companions and the audience at the same time.*

THE POET

I bid you welcome now to Warren's Woods,
But have, alas, to set before your eyes
Only a shadowy dream, such as might come
To any man at the edge of a golden day,
When June shakes out her gown in the deep sky.
There is no special magic in this place,
Nor on my lips the power to invoke it;
But since these woods are very old and calm,
Much as they were before our city was born,
And doubtless full of elemental things,
Which promise swift enchantment, I invite
Your patience for a time. Perhaps a voice
May speak, or shadowy figures come and go.

Let us sit down at least to watch and listen,
For in a sense this dream involves us all,
And they are one with it who choose to be.

[THE POET *and his companions sit down near the camp-fire, laying their fagots beside them.* THE FAUN'S *voice is heard speaking from the thicket.*]

THE FAUN

I have cast my garment of chilly sleep.
I have drenched my lips in April rain.
I have bathed in the fires of May again,
And seen the glory of Summer creep,
Petal by petal, and wing by wing,
Back through the open gates of the Spring.

THE WOOD SPRITE

[*Also speaking from the woods.*]

We have tossed our luring songs on the air,
And the good gay winds have hurried them down
To the grimy roofs of the waiting town,
For the sparrows to twitter in street and square,
Till everyone stops in his work to say:
"It must be sweet in the woods today!"

THE FAUN

[*His voice coming nearer.*]

I will set my silver pipes to my mouth,
And pipe a welcome to everyone
That loves to walk in the wind and sun.
I will pipe the small birds up from the South,
Till everyone knows of the feast I make
At the edge of the wood for the Summer's sake.

THE POET

[*Rising to his knees.*]

Creatures of the unfathomed twilight,
Spirits of the gay woods,

I call upon you to take living shapes.
I call upon you to complete the dream.

[THE FAUN *emerges timidly from the thicket, followed by* THE WOOD SPRITE.]

THE FAUN

Who calls us?

THE POET

Be not afraid.
I am a friend speaking in the name of friends.
We are city dwellers, come upon a pilgrimage.
We seek enchantment that will ease us of the city's fever.
And because I am a poet and have a knowledge of such things,
My companions have made me their leader,
And I have promised them a dream
Out of this untroubled silence.

THE WOOD SPRITE

And why have you sought enchantment, Master Poet,
At the edge of the wood?

THE POET

I know, but I cannot put it into words.

THE FAUN

Last night a gentle wind, out of the dark
Said to you: "Brother mine,
The moon is just a little ivory barque
Riding a sea of wine.
But when she comes to port, her merchandise,
Bale upon bale, unrolled,
Will cover every hillside under the skies
With robes of green and gold."

THE POET

It is the truth.
I listened and my spirit was shaken with the call.

It quivered as a branch quivers with the touch of a miraculous bird.

THE FAUN

It was indeed my voice that reached you;
And by that token I know you for a friend.

THE ARTIST

Tell us, Master Faun!
Are you a god or a creature of the moving leaves,
A figment of the sunshine only,
Or a mortal thing that must die like ourselves?

THE FAUN

I am neither the one thing nor the other;
But in a sense I have the powers of a god;
And in so far as man chooses to preserve me,
I am immortal.
A little while ago I was hunted and forlorn,
I beheld myself a fugitive about to be driven from your state.
I was bruised by the clutching hands of your cities.
I was deafened with the threat of your mills.
I was strangled with the smoke of your engines.
Now, happily, this is changed.
By the good will of my friends a little of my ancient kingdom is preserved to me,
Where I may live beyond reach of axes and plows,
Aye, and because this is so, I have made a pledge.
I have pledged a welcome to all that come in peace and friendliness.

THE ARCHITECT

Your voice is mellow.
It is like the reedy voice of a Tuscan flute;
There is honey in it.
I beg you tell us your name!

THE FAUN

I am called the Ageless Beauty of the Untroubled Woods.

THE MERCHANT

Then you are indeed the god whom we seek,
And in your hands lies the power to weave the dream,
Which the Poet promised us.

THE FAUN

It may be so,
But first tell us why you have brought these fagots.

THE POET

They are the dead sticks we have gathered in the past year;
Dry things that have no life in them and are become heavy upon our shoulders,
Empty honors, cares, jealousies and the fear of poverty and old age.
We have brought them to burn in this camp fire,
That we may see them dwindle to gray ashes,
And out of the leaping flames
Rekindle the Joy of Life.

THE FAUN

You have done wisely.
And when the fire becomes a bed of embers
You shall lie with me in the soft grass,
And watch the night shake out her tinseled sleeves above the treetops.
And later, when the moon is gone,
You shall see the stars swimming over us
Like silver fishes in a bowl of blue stone.
And I shall teach you the wisdom of changeless things.

THE WOOD SPRITE

But first let each of you take up his fagot

And speak a little from his heart,
That my master may know his guests,
Whether they be worthy of his hospitality.

[THE ARTIST *rises and takes up his fagot.*]

THE ARTIST

I will lay my fagot first,
For, of these men, I hold myself the saddest
And most in need of help.

THE FAUN

Speak, friend.

THE ARTIST

I am a maker of pictures.
All my days I have been drunk with swift light and lurking shadow.
I have bathed my soul in the clash of living color.
My blood was driven by the sparkle and rhythm of life.
The city has been my mistress.
I have been the lover of her moods alone.
Out of her mysteries I have wrought all my works
And she has prisoned me in a globe of living faces.
Now I am tired.
I cannot fix upon canvas the semblance of a beauty I no longer see.

[THE ARTIST *lays his fagot upon the pile.*]

THE FAUN

It is well that you have come.
And when the trees are turbanned with little veils of blue smoke,
Perhaps the blindness will pass,
That you may behold a deathless loveliness,
Loveliness which was old before the first face was graven on the chalk cliffs
And which will be young when the pigments fade upon the walls of man's last tomb.

[THE ARTIST *sits down.* THE ARCHITECT *rises next with his fagot.*]

THE ARCHITECT

I will cast my burden next upon the pile,
For it has weighed sorely upon me.

THE FAUN

Speak, also.

THE ARCHITECT

I am an architect.
All my life I have dreamed in iron and bronze,
In granite and in rare woods.
I have reared mighty skeletons of steel.
I have cloaked them in fabrics of stone and of smooth tiles.
I have garnished them with quaint carvings and windows of painted glass.
The city has been my goddess,
And into the making of her temples I have put all my soul.
I have capped her towers with fine gold,
And I have floored her courts with black marble
To withstand the feet of the years.
But now I am tired.
My brain is sick with the clatter of steam riveters.
I can dream of nothing lordly or wonderful.
I can build nothing for the pleasure or service of men.

THE FAUN

You are welcome, also.
And perhaps, when the flame shoots up its fairy spires,
You may look beyond them into the vistas of a great temple,
A temple whose columns renew themselves continually,
To bear the dome of the eternal heavens.

[THE ARCHITECT *lays his fagot upon the pile and seats himself beside* THE ARTIST.]

THE SPRITE

There is yet one mortal who has not spoken,

[THE MERCHANT *rises with his fagot.*]

THE FAUN

Come, friend, have you nothing to tell us?

THE MERCHANT

Men call me a merchant.
I am a servant of the city's splendor.
All my years I have been shrewd and cautious and cold.
I have given my youth and passion to the handling of golden coins.
I have dealt in all things that are found under the sun,
In silks and in silver, in grain and in precious stones.
I have dealt justly and well,
But now my life is strangled with little threads of gold;
Mine eyes are heavy with the fine dust of money.
I can take no pleasure in the palace I have built or in the gardens I have set about it.
I am sick of all things that are measured or weighed, or bought or sold.
And because I know not where else to seek relief,
I, too, have brought a fagot.

THE FAUN

Lay it with the others.

[THE MERCHANT *lays his fagot with the others.*]

You, also, have done wisely,
And when the little scarlet tongues have licked up your dry sticks,
Perhaps the hard lump in your breast will be melted,
And, if it is,
You will remember another sweet wood where you dreamed when you were a little boy;
You will remember the lake of red gold that dazzled you when the maples were touched with autumn,

And you will understand that no gold you have seen since compares with them.

[THE MERCHANT *sits down beside* THE ARCHITECT. THE POET *rises and places his own fagot on the pile.*]

THE POET

I also lay my fagot with the others.
And now, the pile being ready for the flame,
I pray you, Master Faun, set it alight,
And so complete the enchantment and the dream.

[THE WORKINGMAN *appears at the edge of the clearing, followed by* THE WORKING WOMAN. *The man carries a small lighted lantern. They stand watching the others. No one notices them.*]

THE FAUN

[*To* THE POET.]

Alas, that I cannot do.
It is beyond my power.
You yourselves must set flame to the fagots which you have brought.

THE POET

There is no flame left in my heart.
I cannot light the camp-fire.

THE ARTIST

Nor I.

THE ARCHITECT

Nor I.

THE MERCHANT

Nor I.

THE FAUN

Then we must await some later guest,

Some one that carries a little sacred spark in his breast
That I am powerless to create for you.

THE WOOD SPRITE

[*To* THE FAUN.]
Look, Master!
At the edge of the clearing,
A man and a woman.

THE FAUN

Come forward, strangers.
You are welcome to our gathering.

[THE MAN *and* WOMAN *advance, holding each other by the hand.*]

THE WOMAN

Thanks!

THE WOOD SPRITE

Who are you?

THE MAN

[*Looking at* THE MERCHANT.]
We're just what you call working people, out for a bit of a lark.
We don't figure on pushing in where we ain't wanted.

THE POET

Have you, also, brought fagots for the camp-fire?
Are you also unhappy?
Did you hear the songs?

THE WOMAN

I don't know what you're talking about. We work in a factory. We make good money, too. We've got no call to be unhappy. Besides, we ain't got the time.

THE ARTIST

Then why have you come here?

THE WOMAN

I don't know exactly. Last night it was hot where we live. You could have cut the air with a knife. There was a hand-organ in the street and children dancing under a little dried-up tree at the corner. I just got to thinking and thinking.

THE MAN

Then she says all of a sudden: "What's the matter with going to the country? Tomorrow's a holiday."

THE WOMAN

He ain't exactly strong. We've got something saved so we can afford to go on the train. I thought it would do him good.

THE MAN

"All right, old girl," I says. "I'm willing to try anything once." So, here we are.

THE ARCHITECT

But why do you carry the little lantern?

THE MAN

[*A little sheepishly.*]

I don't know that it's any of your business.

THE FAUN

Perhaps the woman will tell us.

THE WOMAN

It's the lamp of our love, his and mine. We take it around with us wherever we go. It sort of makes it easy to find our way. It never burns down or gets dim, and you can't blow it out.

THE POET

Perhaps, you have come at the right time.
My companions and I have made a fine pile of fagots,
But we cannot light it.
May we take a little fire from your lamp?

THE WOMAN

That you may, and we'll be glad of doing you a good turn.

THE MAN

There's many have lighted fires from our little lantern before now, and the more fire you take from it, the brighter it gets.

THE FAUN

[*To* THE MAN.]

You have completed the dream.
Approach and open your lantern.

[THE MAN *approaches the pile of fagots.* THE ARTIST *lights a stick of wood from it and kneeling sets fire to the pile.* THE POET *stands beside him and addresses the audience.*]

THE POET

The shadowy circle of our spell is made,
And I invite you now to gather round us.
Perhaps you bring some fagots of your own.
If so, I bid you fling them on this camp-fire
And burn your cares with ours. The flame is kindled
With honest friendliness and human love,
To make us one with the completed dream.

THE FAUN

[*Stepping forward.*]

These woods are yours and mine. Your children's children

Shall find us always here to welcome them,
And if they bring us love, we pledge them, surely,
A refuge from the fret of roaring streets;
Silence and beauty, peace and leafy calm,
Unfevered days to make them whole again.
This, and the blessing of the changeless stars.

STAGE GUILD PLAYS

DANCING DOLLS

DANCING DOLLS was first produced by the Department of Drama of the Carnegie Institute of Technology, at Pittsburgh, June 15, 1914, under the direction of Mr. Thomas Wood Stevens, with the following cast:

GILLES	Charles F. Steen
BUFFO	Leo Beiter
MEZZETIN	Charles Meredith
MARGOT	Betty Weston
FINETTA	Marcella Frederick
CLEMENTINA	Florence Little
THE NOTARY	Charles H. Duffy

DANCING DOLLS

The Scene is the interior of a tent, used as a dressing-room by a company of strollers. At the back is a curtain, which cuts off the dressing-room from the stage, the edge of which is seen, raised upon saw-horses to a height of two and a half feet. There are wooden steps leading from the stage to the ground. At the right is a door, merely a flap in the canvas, which is supposed to be an entrance from outside; in other words, the stage door. At the opposite side is another flap leading to a smaller tent, used by the ladies of the company. There are several costumes lying on the backs of chairs, and a make-up table, equipped with a mirror and a large candle reflector, stands at left near the front.

As the curtain rises, BUFFO *sits at a small table, a little to the right of the centre, with his back to the stage door.* GILLES *is seated on the back of a chair across the table from* BUFFO *and is telling him a funny story.* BUFFO *has a bouquet of flowers clasped in one hand and is laughing uproariously. Beside his chair is a covered basket. The music is playing faintly, as if a performance were going on behind the back-cloth.*

The Time is the late afternoon of a spring day early in the eighteenth century.

The Place is a country town, somewhere in the south of France.

BUFFO. Ho, ho! Ha, ha! That's the most comical thing I ever heard!

GILLES. Wait till I tell you the rest of it. There was the young count, with a bouquet of roses in one hand, and a leg of lamb in the other—

BUFFO. [*Slapping the table.*] Ho, ho! Ha, ha! Go on, go on!

GILLES. [*Illustrating his story by waving his arms.*] Bottles flying—just imagine it! Chairs breaking—all hell broken loose in a jiffy, like a what-do-you-call-it in a crockery shop.

BUFFO. Splendid! Splendid! Ho, ho! Ha, ha! [*He sways back and forth.*]

GILLES. [*Climbing down from his perch and striking a pose.*] I jumped between Mezzetin and the count. "Sir," I cried, "How dare you force your way into the ladies' dressing-room?"

BUFFO. [*Awestruck.*] You said that to a real count?

GILLES. We actors must stand on our dignity.

BUFFO. But didn't you get into trouble?

GILLES. Poof! We had supper together afterward.

BUFFO. You come in contact with *very* distinguished people.

GILLES. Artists come in contact with *everybody*.

BUFFO. [*Leaning forward eagerly, his elbows on the table.*] You play before the *nobility*?

GILLES. In their own houses.

BUFFO. And the *clergy*?

[*He draws up his chair to the table and sits down.*]

GILLES. My dear sir, we have a morality play, all about the damnation of somebody-or-other. Mezzetin groans like a bull in real hell-fire. It always gets them.

BUFFO. I acted once, myself.

GILLES. [*Feigning amazement and admiration.*] Indeed?

BUFFO. [*Nodding his head.*] I was the clown in a tragedy.

GILLES. But I thought your vocation was raising poultry?

BUFFO. [*Proudly.*] I own the largest poultry farm in the county.

GILLES. You find poultry and the neighborhood congenial to a man of your refined tastes?

BUFFO. [*Sadly conscious of his superiority to his neighbors.*] Alas, no! I find them dull as mud. No one of culture to spend a quiet evening with. No one of finer feelings to criticise my poems.

GILLES. *What*, you're a poet, too?

BUFFO. I've written two poems and a play.

GILLES. You amaze me! Was the play given?

BUFFO. [*Shaking his head.*] No. It was rejected solely because it requires two elephants and a camel.

GILLES. Was it written in verse?

BUFFO. No. It was written in pantomime.

GILLES. You certainly amaze me! Why, a man of your talents could make a fortune in the profession.

BUFFO. [*Eagerly.*] Do you think so?

GILLES. [*Rising and again illustrating by gestures.*] Not a doubt of it! Take this company for instance. The investment isn't large. The profits are most satisfactory, and the personnel is charming. Mezzetin, the talented tragedian and sword-swallower, Margot, the delirious dancer, and—I kiss my hand to her—Finetta.

BUFFO. [*Rising, with the bouquet in his hand.*] Of course! That reminds me, I've brought this bouquet of roses to Mistress Finetta—I kiss my hand to her.

GILLES. Bravo! I see you have the grand manner.

BUFFO. There's a poem pinned to them.

GILLES. Never mind the poem.

[*He snatches the flowers from* BUFFO *and buries his nose in them.*]

BUFFO. [*Reaching for the flowers.*] But—but—

GILLES. Oh, immortal roses! Roses that die in a day, and live forever! There's joy in the breath of you; hint of all the dancing, and laughter, and scarlet lips of the world!

BUFFO. But, I say!

[*The music stops suddenly, and* GILLES *sinks into the chair.*]

GILLES. Oh, terrible roses! There's sadness in you, too. Tears in your hearts; scarlet tears for the loves we couldn't keep. There's the savor of the churchyard about you; hint of finished music, and tired feet, and aching eyes, and empty hands. Oh, roses, roses!

[*He tosses away the flowers, and clasps his hands.*]

BUFFO. Yes, yes! I think I said something about roses in my poem.

GILLES. [*Coming to himself.*] The devil! Ah, I'd forgotten you and your confounded poem.

BUFFO. [*Producing his basket.*] But, see here what else I've brought, just to make sure I'd please her. You can't make a meal off roses.

GILLES. Pray, sir, explain.

BUFFO. It's a cold roast capon; that's what it is! And a head of lettuce, and a bottle of red wine. Ha, ha! Ho, ho! Please the stomach, please the heart—that's my motto.

[*The music strikes up again. There is a chatter of girls' voices, and clapping of hands.* GILLES *jumps up and seizes* BUFFO'S *basket.*]

GILLES. Quick now! Give it to me! The act's over. Mezzetin's swallowed his sword. I can't let him catch you here.

[*He snatches the basket and sets it on the floor behind the table.*]

BUFFO. Wait a minute! Wait a minute!

GILLES. [*Returning to* BUFFO.] Out with you! Stir your stumps!

BUFFO. But, I say! Wait a minute! I want to speak to Mistress Finetta.

GILLES. [*Dragging at* BUFFO'S *coat.*] Oh, for a team of horses! Out with you or I'll do something desperate.

[*He pulls* BUFFO *to the door at the right.* MEZ-

ZETIN *enters from the stage, followed by the two girls. The music is still playing.* MEZZETIN *strikes an attitude.*]

MEZZETIN. [*Flourishing his wooden sword.*]
"'Twas thus I scaled the flaming breach of Troy.
While all the plain, a reeking sea of blood,
Gurgled below me."
Ha, who's this? [*He points to* BUFFO.]

BUFFO. I—I—beg your pardon. I'm going.
[*Exit* BUFFO. GILLES *sinks into a chair, laughing.*]

MARGOT. [*Taking a turn on her toes.*] Who was the funny little man?

GILLES. Just a bigger fool than ourselves.

MEZZETIN. [*Throwing off his cloak.*] In that case, I opine that the person has lent Gilles money.
[*He sits down at the make-up table, and preens himself before the mirror.*]

FINETTA. [*Fretfully.*] Don't we get any supper?

GILLES. [*Jumping up.*] That we do! I'll beat the drum while somebody cooks a little bean soup.

FINETTA. [*Turning on* GILLES.] I don't want any bean soup.

MARGOT. I am afraid there isn't anything else.

FINETTA. [*Stamping her foot.*] Then cook it yourself. I'm going to lie down.
[*She starts toward the door at the left.*]

MARGOT. Of course, I'll cook it if you won't.

GILLES. [*Picking up a clown's suit.*] There's a good

girl—always ready to do her share of the work. [*To* FINETTA, *who has stopped and is eyeing* MARGOT *jealously.*] By the way, my dear, here's a nice pair of white what-you-may-call-'ems, minus part of the seat.

FINETTA. [*Stamping her foot again.*] You're always trying to have me mend something.

GILLES. But look at them, in the name of common decency!

FINETTA. Give them to Margot—she's a good girl—she's obliging—

GILLES. [*Backing away cautiously and picking up* BUFFO'S *flowers.*] Don't be huffy! See what I've bought for you—a nice bouquet of lovely thingumbobs!
[*He hands her the flowers.*]

FINETTA. I don't want the nasty flowers.
[*She throws them on the floor and flounces through door at left.*]

GILLES. [*Ruefully.*] Now, there's a devil of a temper for you!

MEZZETIN. [*Leaning back with a gesture of evident self satisfaction.*]
"'Twas thus Adonis in the morning glow
Of Attic April set her heart aflame."

GILLES. [*Turning upon* MEZZETIN.] Your smirk is positively ridiculous.

MARGOT. What on earth has got into you?

MEZZETIN. [*Rising with alacrity and striking an attitude.*] The anticipation of a good time. The pleasurable sense of a perfectly unsought conquest! My friends, I am dining at the inn with a charming

young lady. Poor little thing, how she adores me.

GILLES. [*Sarcastically.*] At her expense?

MEZZETIN. Certainly!

MARGOT. [*With a smiling attempt to appear unconcerned.*] Don't break her heart.

[*She takes the clown suit from* GILLES *and sits down to sew.*]

MEZZETIN. That's her affair.

THE NOTARY. [*Outside.*] Mr. Mezzetin! Oh, Mr. Mezzetin!

MEZZETIN. [*Going toward the door at the right.*] Ah, ha! It's my friend, the notary. Come in, come in, Mr. Notary. Damn it, where's my cloak? [*He turns and looks for his cloak.*]

THE NOTARY. [*Entering timidly.*] I beg your pardon!

MEZZETIN. I'll be with you in a moment. [*He finds his cloak and throws it about his shoulders.*] A thousand pardons! My friends, Mr. Gilles and Mistress Margot. Two of the most talented artists in the profession.

GILLES. [*Making an exaggerated bow.*] Charmed!

MARGOT. [*Making an exaggerated curtsy.*] Delighted!

THE NOTARY. [*With a tremendous effort to outdo both of them.*] Overwhelmed!

MEZZETIN. [*Impressively.*] You've heard me speak of my friend, the notary. He's been good enough to stop for me. He dines with us tonight, for the sake of propriety, at the Blue Pig.

THE NOTARY. A great honor—a great honor, I assure you! Are you ready, Mr. Mezzetin?

MEZZETIN. [*With a grand flourish.*] After you, my dear sir!

THE NOTARY. Overwhelmed!

MARGOT. Delighted.

GILLES. Charmed!

[*All of them repeat their bows.* THE NOTARY *goes out.* MEZZETIN *follows him but turns at the door to declaim.*]

MEZZETIN.

"Thus, Paris, musing on the Spartans' Queen,
With stately tread, approached the banquet hall."

[*He goes out.*]

GILLES. [*Snappishly.*] Ha, ha! [*He turns to* MARGOT.] There's the devil of a chap for you! Well, it's one less mouth to feed here. [*He puts* BUFFO'S *basket on the table and begins taking out the contents.*] Never mind! There'll be no bean soup for us tonight, if we *don't* dine at the Blue Pig.

MARGOT. [*Laying down the clown's suit and rising.*] There, I've finished your patch. Now I'll be getting our supper.

GILLES. No need, my dear. Behold the table spread; the feast prepared! A cold roast capon, a head of lettuce, and a bottle of red wine.

MARGOT. [*Clapping her hands.*] Wizard! Where did they come from?

GILLES. I took them out of the old drum, the way I take rabbits out of my hat at the fair.

MARGOT. Seriously?

GILLES. Seriously. Well, I bought them at the Blue Pig.

MARGOT. Honestly?

GILLES. Honestly. Well, to be quite honest, I stole them, basket and all.

MARGOT. [*Laughing.*] How delicious!
[*She pulls up her chair.*]

GILLES. Yes, aren't they? The butter is under that leaf of green stuff.
[*He sits down at the table.*]

MARGOT. How wonderful it would be to have such things every day! I ought to have been a farmer's wife.

GILLES. You ought to have been a duchess.

MARGOT. [*A little sadly.*] No, no! Just a plain farmer's wife, to sew and cook and scrub pans. To stay in one place all the time. Oh, it would be heavenly to work in a nice wet garden.

GILLES. With those little hands?

MARGOT. [*Pushing back her chair and turning away.*] Don't! Please don't tease me!

GILLES. There! There! Why, what's the matter with your eyes?

MARGOT. I'm tired—tired—I don't want to be teased.

GILLES. Child! Child! I'm not teasing you. I'll tell you a secret. *I'd* like to work in a garden, too. *I've* looked over the walls lots of times when we've been trundling along the roads. *I've* peeped through the

little green gates in the hedges and wanted to be inside, digging and planting and pulling things up.

MARGOT. [*Drying her eyes.*] In those clothes? It's too ridiculous!

GILLES. But I didn't always wear this rig, you know. I wasn't meant for this business we're in. I didn't always shout, and dance, and beat a drum, and juggle eggs. How I got into it, I don't know. Why I stay in it, I don't know. I'm always wishing and wishing—

MARGOT. [*Eagerly.*] What are you always wishing and wishing?

GILLES. [*Rather glumly.*] I don't know—something or other. That I could settle down some place where I'd never hear the sound of a drum.

MARGOT. What would Finetta say to that?

GILLES. Confound it! Of course, she'd say I was a fool! That girl's one of those what-do-you-call-'ems, those spinning things. You can't stop her without killing her.

MARGOT. I never dreamt you felt this way. It's fun to have someone to talk to.

GILLES. Oh, Lord—I suppose you're like the rest. A woman talks and talks and never knows what she wants. Now, take Finetta for example—

MARGOT. [*Tapping her foot.*] Oh, yes, Finetta—you can't get Finetta out of your head.

GILLES. I can't, eh? Well, maybe I can't. Never mind me. Cheer up and eat something.

MARGOT. [*Drawing up to the table again.*] Isn't it fun! Let me pour the wine.

GILLES. Splendid! Let's be domestic. Let's talk about cows, and chickens, and smelly barnyards.

MARGOT. And nice, cool, wet gardens.

GILLES. And a what-do-you-call-it, covered with vines, to sit under.

MARGOT. [*Thoughtfully.*] Do you suppose Mezzetin ever thinks of such things?

GILLES. There you go! Didn't I know it? We're all in the same boat. It's the old story! Everything jumbled up the wrong way. Everybody mismated. You and Mezzetin, Finetta and me. They're the gay ones; always on the go, happy-go-lucky; devil-may-care; not a trouble in the world. This sort of life's the very breath of their bodies. Look at Finetta!

MARGOT. Look at Mezzetin!

GILLES. All right, look at him! What do you see?

MARGOT. A human jumping-jack. He's all springs. He couldn't be happy unless he was dancing.

GILLES. [*Pleased, and becoming sure of himself.*] That's just it! There you are! Now look at us. We're quiet. We're domestic. We'd never dance at all if we didn't have to. If—

MARGOT. Well, but what's the answer?

GILLES. I don't know. That we fuss, and fume, and stick to it, I suppose. Wait! Yes, I do know, too! Look here—I've a great what-you-may-call-it. Just popped into my head! You and I are beautifully suited to each other—make one another happy for life—I've just found it out in the last five seconds. It solves the whole thing. Why not quit together, and then start together?

MARGOT. [*Laughing.*] It might mean starting together, and then quitting separately.

GILLES. No, but seriously! I tell you I've made up my mind! I've thought it all out in detail. It's my mission in life to make you happy.

MARGOT. You've made your decision pretty suddenly.

GILLES. [*Jumping up.*] All great decisions are made just that way. Why, confound it, look at what's-his-name, the great African King. He decided to invade what-was-the-place? Well, never mind. He decided to invade it anyway, and made all his plans while he was eating a piece of tripe at breakfast. And see what happened! Why he died Emperor of—Emperor of something-or-other, just because he had the courage of his convictions.

MARGOT. Well, what *are* your plans for my happiness?

GILLES. [*After a moment's reflection.*] I'll sell my interest in the show to Mezzetin.

MARGOT. But, Mezzetin hasn't any money!

GILLES. [*Wildly enthusiastic.*] Never mind! I'll sell it to somebody! We'll get married, and buy a castle, or a cottage, or a what's-its-name, and settle down on it, and raise thingumbobs or something for market.

MARGOT. But, Gilles, you've *got* to have more definite plans than *that.*

GILLES. Wait a minute! Don't hurry me! I've got something rattling around in my head. It'll all come out in a jiffy. I was talking to somebody, just a few minutes ago, about something.

BUFFO. [*Outside.*] Oh, Mr. Gilles! Oh, Mr. Gilles! May I come in?

GILLES. There! Listen! Where have I heard that voice before? Where *have* I heard that voice?

BUFFO. May I come in?

MARGOT. It's the little fat man.

GILLES. [*Going toward the door at the right.*] Of course, it is! Come in! Come in! Now I have it. I told you I had it all thought out!

[BUFFO *enters.* GILLES *seizes his hand and drags him to the center of the stage.*]

BUFFO. I—I beg your pardon for intruding again—

GILLES. My dear sir, you're the very man I've been waiting for.

BUFFO. But I only came to see if you had given my bouquet to Mistress Finetta?

GILLES. She was entranced.

BUFFO. [*With increasing eagerness.*] And the poem?

GILLES. She was enraptured.

BUFFO. And the basket?

GILLES. [*Pointing to the table.*] You can see for yourself. She ate nearly all of it at one sitting.

BUFFO. [*Very eagerly.*] Might I speak to her now?

GILLES. Oh, my dear sir! She's inside there sleeping it off. You couldn't wake her if you banged a drum at her ear.

BUFFO. [*Disappointed, but nodding his head.*] I

quite understand. I do the same thing myself after a heavy meal.

[*He starts toward the door at the right.*]

GILLES. [*Stopping him.*] Don't go. I want to talk with you.

[*He takes* BUFFO'S *arm.*]

BUFFO. But I'm afraid I'm intruding.

[*He looks at* MARGOT *and winks.*]

GILLES. By no means! This is my fiancee, Mistress Margot.

MARGOT. [*Rising and making a curtsy.*] Charmed to make your acquaintance.

BUFFO. [*Bowing awkwardly.*] Delighted, I'm sure.

[MARGOT *sits down again.*]

GILLES. Good, now you know each other. Well, sir, as you were saying—

BUFFO. I wasn't saying anything.

GILLES. [*His hand to his head.*] Of course not! I was saying something. Well, as I was saying—what was I saying?

MARGOT. That you had an idea.

GILLES. Yes, yes, yes! Now I have it! [*To* BUFFO.] You were telling me that you'd made up your mind to go on the stage.

BUFFO. But, wait a minute. Wait a minute!

GILLES. In fact, you offered me a large sum for my share in this company!

BUFFO. [*Puzzled.*] I don't think we got as far as

that. I don't remember that we got as far as that.

GILLES. Didn't we? That's strange! I seem to remember it quite distinctly. Never mind. I've decided to exchange my half-interest in this organization, all properties, costumes, musical instruments, scenery, and so forth, for your farm. No questions asked.

BUFFO. [*Sitting down.*] But I haven't had time to think.

GILLES. You'll never get such a chance again.

BUFFO. But, the other members of the company, do they agree?

GILLES. Absolutely! They retain their positions, of course.

BUFFO. [*Eagerly.*] And Mistress Finetta?

GILLES. She was delighted with the scheme.

BUFFO. [*Scratching his head.*] It's tempting—very tempting—but I really know very little about acting.

GILLES. There's very little to know. All you need is a good presence, and a fine voice, and control of your hands and feet. I can teach you everything in one lesson.

BUFFO. But—but—

GILLES. There's only two kinds of acting; tragic and comic.

BUFFO. I *did* act in a tragedy once.

GILLES. Good! That settles tragedy. There's only comedy left. It's very simple.

BUFFO. But *I* don't know anything about comedy. *I* couldn't be funny. .

GILLES. Oh, yes, you could. You only need a few tricks to make people laugh.

BUFFO. What else?

GILLES. Just a few jokes to keep them laughing.

BUFFO. What kind of jokes? I'm afraid I don't know any jokes.

GILLES. Oh, any old wheeze—one would do at a pinch. Let me think. There's a fine one, about a what's-its-name that got loose in a what-do-you-call-it. I'll tell you in a minute.

BUFFO. [*Dubiously.*] That *does* sound funny.

GILLES. You wink at the audience and say—confound it, what do you say? Never mind, I'll tell you later. Sir, I congratulate you! I congratulate you with all my heart!

[*He seizes* BUFFO'S *hand and shakes it violently.*]

BUFFO. [*Wincing, and pulling away his hand.*] But, my dear Mr. Gilles, let me explain.

GILLES. What! You're not satisfied?

BUFFO. [*Working his right hand as if it had been injured.*] I'm trying to tell you. I don't want any misunderstanding. I only own *half* the poultry farm. The other half belongs to a young lady, a cousin of mine. It's because of her that I'd like to sell out. She wants to marry me.

GILLES. Which half do you own?

BUFFO. Do you mean the largest half, or the smallest half?

GILLES. No, no! I mean do you own the flat part—the what's-its-name—or the thingumbobs—what sticks up from it?

BUFFO. [*Completely puzzled.*] Do you mean which half, dividing it north and south, or which half dividing it east and west?

MARGOT. [*Clasping her hands.*] Do you own the nice wet garden?

GILLES. Do you own the house?

BUFFO. Wait a minute! Let me get this straight.

GILLES. [*Impatiently.*] There's only two sides to a house; the inside and the outside. Which side do you own?

BUFFO. [*Almost in tears.*] I don't know, we inherited it. It wasn't mentioned in the will.

GILLES. Never mind! We'll settle that with your cousin when we move in.

BUFFO. It does sound simple.

GILLES. Here's my hand on the agreement. I congratulate you, sir! Nothing else to say.

[*He makes a grab for* BUFFO'S *hand.* BUFFO *draws it away.* GILLES *unabashed slaps him heartily on the back.*]

BUFFO. [*Doubtfully.*] Thank you! Thank you very much!

MARGOT. But aren't there some formalities?

GILLES. Of course! How stupid of me! There's a thingumajig to sign before—before a—

BUFFO. A transfer to sign before a notary.

GILLES. Yes, yes, yes! A transfer to sign before a notary. Wait a minute! Didn't I see one of 'em here awhile ago?

MARGOT. Mezzetin's friend.

GILLES. I knew I'd think of it. We'll go and find him.

[*He starts toward the door, picking up* BUFFO's *hat.*]

BUFFO. [*Stupidly.*] But—but—stop a minute!

GILLES. [*Clapping the hat on* BUFFO's *head.*] Here's your hat. Come on, Margot.

[*He pulls* BUFFO *out of his chair.* MARGOT *rises to follow them.* FINETTA *enters at the left.* BUFFO *sees her and holds back.*]

BUFFO. There's Mistress Finetta. I want to speak to her!

GILLES. [*Pulling at* BUFFO's *arm.*] She's only come back to eat more food. You'll see plenty of her later.

[*He pushes* BUFFO *out and follows him.*]

FINETTA. [*To* MARGOT.] Where are you going?

MARGOT. [*Carelessly.*] Oh, out to take a little stroll.

FINETTA. [*Fretfully.*] Didn't you cook any supper for me?

MARGOT. You'll find something left on the table.

[*She goes out.*]

FINETTA. [*Looking at the remains of the feast.*] Pigs! Greedy pigs!

[*She sets the things to rights, and sits down as if wondering which of the remnants she will try to eat.* MEZZETIN *sticks his head in at the opening of the back curtain.*]

MEZZETIN. [*In a whisper.*] Hist! Finetta! Anybody here?

FINETTA. [*Sullenly.*] Not a soul!

MEZZETIN. [*Entering with an angry flourish.*] It's lucky for Gilles that he's out of my sight! I'd do him a terrible injury. I've never been so insulted in my life.

[*He strides up and down with gestures of rage.*]

FINETTA. [*Not at all impressed.*] Stop beating your chest and tell me what's the matter.

MEZZETIN. That notary is a perfect ass, if there ever was one.

FINETTA. What notary?

MEZZETIN. [*Flourishing a piece of paper.*] Why, the note who gave me this notary—I mean, the notary who gave me this note! Confound his stupidity! He gave it to the wrong man. She didn't even offer me a glass of beer.

FINETTA. [*Coolly.*] I haven't the least idea of what you're talking about.

MEZZETIN. [*Throwing off his cloak.*] I'm talking about a stage-struck fool of a country girl; the village heiress, to judge by the looks of her. She's ugly enough to own half the district.

FINETTA. What did she want?

MEZZETIN. What did she want? Why the dolt's fallen in love with that drum-beating numskull, that wooden-faced clown, that egg-juggling Gilles.

FINETTA. Well, what of it?

MEZZETIN. I tell you, I got the cold shoulder from a woman for the first time in my life.

FINETTA. Oh, is that all!

MEZZETIN. [*Turning on her.*] It is not. She had the effrontery to ask me to run back and fetch him. Then she had the consummate audacity to make me a purely business proposition. She offered to exchange her share of a country estate for my share of this theatrical enterprise, solely to be near that grinning shrimp, that clumsy, infernal buffoon that hasn't a spark of true tragic art in his entire carcass.

FINETTA. [*Sarcastically.*] I suppose you fell on her neck?

MEZZETIN. I merely drew myself up and left the room with becoming hauteur.

FINETTA. Huh!

MEZZETIN. [*Noticing the food for the first time.*] Who's been having a feast here?

[*He draws up a chair and sits down.*]

FINETTA. Margot and Gilles.

MEZZETIN. [*Tipping up the wine bottle.*] Wouldn't you know it? Not a drop left. That's the gratitude of the world. Dancing Dolls like Gilles and Margot always getting the best of everything; while true artists are equally sure to always come out at the small end of the horn.

FINETTA. [*Helping herself out of the basket.*] I don't suppose Margot ever had a truly spiritual thought in her life.

MEZZETIN. [*With a gesture of superiority.*] Poof! They have no fine feelings, no dignity of soul, no sense of the all-pervading spirit of tragedy.

FINETTA. Oh, I'm tired of it! I wish I never had to see Gilles again.

MEZZETIN. [*Beginning to eat.*] Tush! It's the old story. Everyone mismated. Lovers unhappy. You and Gilles, Margot and I. It's the tragic rectangle.

FINETTA. But *we're* the only unhappy ones. It doesn't seem fair!

MEZZETIN. [*His mouth full.*] I shall retire to private life. If the public won't appreciate me, let it do without me. In some isolated retreat, I shall muse upon the terrible cosmic hollowness, the futility of tragic genius.

FINETTA. But what about *me*? What's to become of *me*?

MEZZETIN. [*Gloomily.*] I see it all. You shall be my wife. We will forget the sneers of the world. Our mutual unhappiness makes us marvellously suited to each other.

FINETTA. But what are we going to live on?

MEZZETIN.

"Thus, Cæsar, musing on the shattered gods,
Forsook the rostrum for the lonely hills."

[*He thinks for a moment, then slaps his knee.*]

I will sell my interest in this company to Gilles.

FINETTA. But Gilles hasn't any money!

MEZZETIN. True! Let me think.

CLEMENTINA. [*Outside.*] Oh, Mr. Gilles! Mr. Gilles, are you there?

MEZZETIN. [*Startled.*] Ah!

FINETTA. Who's that?

MEZZETIN. [*Jumping up.*] It's the village heiress! It's the solution of our difficulty!

CLEMENTINA. [*At the door.*] Mr. Gilles! Oh, Mr. Gilles! May I come in?

[*She enters at the right.*]

MEZZETIN. [*Bowing.*]

"'Twas thus Aurora, with her golden smile,
Awoke new summer in the heart of Mars."

CLEMENTINA. [*Taken aback at seeing* MEZZETIN.] I —I beg your pardon, I was looking for Mr. Gilles.

MEZZETIN. I've just sent him to meet you at the inn. Permit me!

[*He offers her a chair.*]

CLEMENTINA. [*Very bashfully.*] I—I'm afraid I'm intruding.

MEZZETIN. [*Quite at his ease.*] Allow me to present my fiancee, Mistress Finetta. My dear, this is the young lady I've been telling you about, the charming young lady with such remarkable dramatic talents.

[*He hands* CLEMENTINA *into the chair. She sits down stiffly, with evident embarrassment.*]

CLEMENTINA. You're very kind, Mr. Mezzetin. I

thought you were angry with me when you left the Blue Pig in such a hurry.

MEZZETIN. [*In an injured tone.*] Angry at you! Oh, my dear young lady, how very absurd! I was merely anxious to consult Mistress Finetta, as promptly as possible, about our little business transaction.

CLEMENTINA. [*Looking stupidly at* FINETTA.] Business transaction?

MEZZETIN. She's enchanted with the arrangement.

CLEMENTINA. Arrangement?

MEZZETIN. I exchange my interest in this organization, including all scenery, costumes, properties, musical instruments and live stock, for your country estate. Madame, I congratulate you!

CLEMENTINA. But, Mr. Mezzetin—oh dear—I hardly know—

MEZZETIN. Now, now! Pray don't overwhelm me with your thanks.

CLEMENTINA. [*Wringing her hands.*] Oh dear, I hardly know what to say! I hardly know anything about acting—I'm afraid I've made a mistake—I hardly know anything at all.

MEZZETIN. Don't distress yourself. A woman's success on the stage isn't purely a matter of technique. It's appearance that counts; an appearance like yours, an emotional disposition—it's really better if she doesn't know anything.

CLEMENTINA. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! What will Mr. Gilles say, if he thinks I'm running after him?

MEZZETIN. He's overjoyed.

CLEMENTINA. It *is* a temptation—Oh dear! Oh dear! I hardly know what to do.

MEZZETIN. [*Picking up his cloak.*] Bravo! Then it's all settled. I'll look for our friend, the notary. Madame, I congratulate you with all my heart!

[*There is a sound of voices outside.*]

FINETTA. [*Listening.*] There's the notary now.

MEZZETIN. [*Rubbing his hands.*] Good! He can draw up the documents.

CLEMENTINA. [*Much excited.*] Oh dear! Oh dear! I hear Mr. Gilles's voice.

GILLES. [*Outside.*] It doesn't matter at all, sir, it doesn't matter at all! The what-you-may-call-it's of no consequence whatever. It's the thingumajig that counts.

[*Enter the* NOTARY *and* GILLES, *arm in arm, followed by* MARGOT *and* BUFFO.]

THE NOTARY. But there are certain legal points of a most delicate nature. The locus tenantibus for example, and the fides in particularum.

[MEZZETIN *spreads his cloak to hide* CLEMENTINA.]

MARGOT. Never mind the tenantibus and the particularum. It's the garden I want to know about!

BUFFO. I can't seem to get this all straight!

MEZZETIN. [*Seizing* THE NOTARY'S *hand.*] My dear friend! My very dear friend!

[*He keeps between* CLEMENTINA *and the others.*]

THE NOTARY. Pray, sir, don't distract my attention!

MEZZETIN. But this is most urgent! Here's a young lady that's just induced me to purchase her share of a country estate and she's naturally most anxious to close the transaction before I alter my mind.

THE NOTARY. Dear, dear! This is most confusing! May I ask, sir, to what young lady you refer?

MEZZETIN. [*Stepping back and disclosing his prize.*] The young lady will speak for herself.

BUFFO. Clementina!

[THE NOTARY *puts his glasses on and recognizes* CLEMENTINA.]

THE NOTARY. Dear, dear! This is most confusing.

CLEMENTINA. [*Rising.*] Oh, Mr. Notary, I hardly know how to explain. Oh dear! I hardly know anything at all.

[*She sinks back again into the chair.*]

THE NOTARY. Ah, that's better! That's much better! When one asks for legal advice, one isn't expected to know anything.

GILLES. [*To* MEZZETIN.] Confound it all! Just when I have the what-do-you-call-it all figured out, you go and stick *your* nose into it. Can't you wait till I've finished my business with the what's-his-name here?

MARGOT. But I thought it *was* all settled. We're to get the nice wet garden.

GILLES. Of course, it's all settled; all but signing the what-do-you-call-it. We're to have the inside of the house.

MEZZETIN. [*Advancing upon* GILLES.] *We? We?* May I ask whom you mean by *we*?

MARGOT. Gilles and I have bought a farm. We're going to be married and settle down.

MEZZETIN. [*In a rage.*] Ten Thousand Thunders! Do you mean to tell me that you're thinking of marrying that numskull? That you're deliberately deserting me; that you've actually forgotten all sense of loyalty and gratitude?

GILLES. [*Also becoming angry.*] Hold your horses there! Hold your horses!

MEZZETIN. [*To* GILLES.] Don't come in my way, knave, or I'll crack your head like one of your wooden eggs. I'll beat you within an inch of your silly life! I'll teach you to ruin my happiness!

[*The two men glare at each other.*]

FINETTA. [*Wringing her hands.*] Oh dear! Oh dear!

MARGOT. Don't let them hurt each other!

CLEMENTINA. [*To* MEZZETIN.] But I thought you wanted to buy my share of the farm so that you could marry Mistress Finetta.

GILLES. What's that? You marry Finetta! Damn it, you've been trying to steal her affections behind my back.

[*He moves toward* MEZZETIN.]

MEZZETIN. [*Backing away from him.*] Let's look at this thing rationally!

MARGOT. [*Running to* MEZZETIN.] I won't stand by and see you hurt!

FINETTA. [*Running to* GILLES.] Don't, oh don't do anything rash!

CLEMENTINA. [*Running to* BUFFO.] O Buffo! Buffo! O Saint Stephen, and Saint Edgar!

BUFFO. [*Clasping her in his arms.*] I can't seem to get this straight.

[FINETTA *clings to* GILLES, *who glares at* MEZZETIN. MARGOT *clings to* MEZZETIN, *who looks sheepish.* CLEMENTINA *clings to* BUFFO *who looks completely mystified.*]

THE NOTARY. [*Wringing his hands.*] Dear me! Dear me! This is most confusing! Here's Mr. Buffo and Madame Clementina, joint owners in a poultry farm. Here's Mr. Gilles and Mistress Margot have bought Mr. Buffo's share, and here's Mr. Mezzetin and Mistress Finetta have bought Madame Clementina's share, and here's Mr. Buffo and Madame Clementina have bought a whole theatrical company.

BUFFO. I can't seem to get this straight at all.

THE NOTARY. Dear me! Dear me! I never remember such a rush of business. Two transactions in one day. That means seven hundred and thirty transactions in a year. If it goes on like this, I shall be a rich man.

[*The music strikes up again outside.*]

MARGOT. [*Pricking up her ears.*] Listen!

GILLES. It's time for the evening performance.

MEZZETIN. Zounds! I had quite forgotten it!

FINETTA. So had I!

[*They begin to dance a little in pairs.*]

MARGOT. [*To* MEZZETIN.] Then you won't desert me?

GILLES. [*To* FINETTA.] Then you love me after all?

MEZZETIN. Come, the audience is waiting!

FINETTA. [*Hopping up and down.*] I feel just like dancing!

[*They all join hands and circle around* BUFFO, CLEMENTINA, *and* THE NOTARY, *who stand huddled together in the centre of the stage.*]

MARGOT. Come on everybody!

GILLES. Right you are!

MEZZETIN. Come on! Come on!

FINETTA. Come on!

MARGOT. Hurrah!

GILLES. We're off!

MEZZETIN. Hooray!

FINETTA. Ho, ho!

[*They let go of hands and run off through the back curtain, laughing.* BUFFO *wipes his face with a red handkerchief.*]

THE NOTARY. Dear, dear, dear! Everything seems most confusing!

BUFFO. I never will be able to get this straight.

CLEMENTINA. [*Clinging to* BUFFO.] Hadn't we better keep the poultry farm and get married right away?

BUFFO. *There!* You've hit the nail on the head!

CURTAIN

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